

HOWARD UNIVERSITY

**“Raising Black Excellence: An Exploration of How a Black Operated Seventh-day Adventist School Empowers Black Student Achievement and Development through Liberation and Resistance”**

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## DEDICATION

This research is first dedicated to my Creator and Savior Jesus Christ who gave me the inspiration, vision, resource, and strength to pursue additional education in the field of sociology. I owe an inestimable debt of gratitude and deep appreciation to my loving wife, Carleen, who's willingness to trust divine leading, support and care for our family, and walk with me through an intense season of life ensured that I could successfully complete this doctoral journey. To my daughters, Cayla and Ava, this work is dedicated to you as a reminder that you are able to achieve at the height of your God-given abilities. You both are excellent and capable and must never settle for less than your Creator's standard. To my mother, Elaine, thank you for sacrificing for your children every day and providing an enduring example of faith, courage, and determination. Special gratitude to my siblings, Steve and Kamillah, and my spiritual brother, Keenan, for praying me through the difficult moments. I am grateful for my entire family and my larger church family whose love, support, and life stories provided the impetus for this study. Finally, this work is dedicated to all the school principals and educators who are committed to loving Black children every day, seeing their humanity, and educating them to reach their excellence!

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## **ABSTRACT**

Racial and class inequalities are deeply rooted in the educational structures and institutions of American society. For centuries and continuing today, access to the privileges and advantages of education have been differentially distributed across racial and class groups. For many children of color, equality of educational opportunity remains an elusive reality as many Black and Brown communities suffer from inadequate schools that are underfunded, overcrowded, and underachieving. Historically, Black churches have organized to meet this need for quality schools for Black students by creating and operating their own faith-based schools in these communities. This qualitative case study explores a Black Seventh-day Adventist preK-8 school to gain an understanding of the school and its influence on Black student learning and development. Findings of this study have policy and practice implications regarding liberatory pedagogies and their positive impact on Black student achievement. The broader implications for urban education are also discussed. In addition, findings underscore the agency that urban communities and churches have to resist the educational impacts of social and economic disinvestment from Black students. Such resistance enables these communities to counter racism and social inequality with an educational activism that raises the outcomes and opportunities for Black children.

**Key words:** education, race, faith-based, achievement gap, Seventh-day Adventist schools, opportunity gap, culturally relevant education, resistance, liberation

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction and Background to the Study

American society has failed to adequately service the educational needs of Black and Brown communities. This failure is demonstrated by the wide number of underperforming urban school districts across the nation (Anyon, 1997, Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Ewen, Katz-Fishman, and Slaughter, 1990; Graves, 2011; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Miller, 2013). An investigation into many urban school systems will reveal that schools lack resources and students lack the proper investments necessary to support strong achievement (Berliner, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2012). These conditions of racial and economic inequality characterize an ongoing educational crisis that effectively assigns many urban Black children to failing schools and lower educational outcomes (Grotsky, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Rothstein and Wilder, 2007). From the earliest days, the Black church has had an unrelenting role in pushing for educational access and equality of opportunity for people of color (Du Bois, 1994; Franklin, 1994; Mitchell, 2004; Quarles, 1987). Today, many Black churches continue this tradition of pressing for educational justice by operating their own parochial systems to provide quality educational environments for Black children (Cone, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Wilmore, 2004; U.S. Domestic Policy Council, 2008). These efforts offer a faith-based alternative to society's general failure to provide high quality, high achieving schools for Black communities. Such failure is manifested in the preponderance of underperforming urban public school districts across the nation (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017).

This study explores a Black preK-8 school in the Seventh-day Adventist educational system. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Seventh-day Adventist church has operated its own

system of faith-based schools, now a worldwide system of over 7,500 schools in 150 countries serving 1.5 million students<sup>1</sup>. The Seventh-day Adventist educational system is one of the largest Christian educational systems in the world serving students from preK to the graduate level<sup>2</sup> (Knight, 1990, 2001; White, 1923, 1952). Recognizing the responsibility to service the educational needs in Black communities, Black Seventh-day Adventist churches over the past 70 years established their own school systems covering primarily urban centers of the country (Baker, 2005, 2007; Hector, 2019; Reynolds, 1984; Rock, 2018; White, 1966). These schools have operated for decades among underserved populations whom Wilson called “the truly disadvantaged” (Wilson, 2012).

William J. Wilson provides an historical-contextual analysis of the urban social and economic processes impacting education in the inner city. He details a complex nexus of factors including 1970s deindustrialization, immigration, and the exodus of the Black middle class as creating the socially and economically dislocated urban communities of today (Wilson, 1987:62). This economic disinvestment from these communities led to massive job loss, reduced wages, and an overall weaker community tax base resulting in less resources available for local public schools. Wilson observes that in these under resourced schools, “teachers become frustrated and do not teach and children do not learn” (Wilson, 1987:57). These schools feature double-digit dropout rates and low academic performance which preface a high degree of “educational retardation in the inner city” (Wilson, 1987:58). Blighted by joblessness and low performing schools, a disproportionate concentration of predominantly disadvantaged

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<sup>1</sup> Adventist Education statistics. Retrieved May 6, 2020 <https://adventisteducation.org/abt.html>

<sup>2</sup> Adventist Education statistics. Retrieved May 6, 2020 <https://adventisteducation.org/abt.html>

segments of the urban Black population are contained within these economically isolated and socially disorganized communities (Anyon, 1997; Frankenburg, 2013; Johnson, 2010; Martin and Varner, 2017; Massey and Denton, 1993; Rivkin, 1994; Wilson, 1987:58).

### **Problem Statement**

As policy makers and the American public continue to fail in making the necessary social and economic investments into these communities and their schools, there remains a long and enduring legacy of racial and educational inequality. Ivy Morgan notes, school districts serving Black students receive \$1,800 less per student per year than districts serving White students (Morgan, 2018). Black students in many urban communities thus remain vulnerable to underfunded, under resourced, and under performing schools (Kozol, 1991, 2005). This systematic disinvestment expresses itself in lower social, economic, and academic trajectories for these students and their communities (Grotsky, 2008; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Rothstein, 2004; Milner, 2012, 2013).

Historically, many Black churches have responded to this need by organizing and operating their own schools in these communities to provide quality learning environments for their students and families (Cone, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Wilmore, 2004; U.S. Domestic Policy Council, 2008). Today, Black Seventh-day Adventist churches operate a system of over 75 primary and secondary schools servicing thousands of students in urban communities across the nation (Baker, 2005, 2007; Hector, 2017; Reynolds, 1984; Rock, 2018). But though research documents the significant influence of faith on Black student achievement, there is comparatively little contemporary research on Black faith-based schools (Barrett, 2009, 2010; Byfield, 2008; Jeynes, 2010, 2014, 2015; Madyun and Lee, 2010; Thayer and Kido, 2012;

Toldson and Anderson, 2010). Additionally, though the Adventist commissioned *CognitiveGenesis* project yielded valuable insights on student achievement within the Adventist educational system, research specific to the performance of Black students within Black operated Seventh-day Adventist school systems is deficient (Thayer and Kido, 2012). Finally, sociological inquiry into Black Seventh-day Adventist schools is virtually non-existent. These research gaps leave important Black educational spaces unexplored and critical voices unheard in the ongoing quest for educational equity and excellence. Research into these spaces might otherwise better inform educational policy and practice for marginalized communities.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

In light of these gaps in the literature, this study explored a Black Seventh-day Adventist school to understand how schools like this influence the academic, social, and cultural development of Black students. Findings from this study illustrate the liberatory roles these schools play in underserved communities, as well as reveal their success in supporting strong achievement and learning outcomes for Black students. Also, this study builds on the limited body of research into Black faith-based schools. Additionally, as research on Black Seventh-day Adventist schools is lacking, this study helps to fill this gap. Findings also offer insights into effective pedagogies and best practices for success in urban education. Furthermore, findings from this study provide additional evidence that deficit-framed educational narratives that pathologize urban communities and their children are deficient and inadequate in their conceptualization.

Finally, findings from this research add to the empirical literature that affirms the positive impact of religious education in urban communities (Barrett, 2009, 2010; Byfield, 2008;

Jeynes, 2010, 2014, 2015; Toldson and Anderson, 2010). Findings highlight how churches and local communities have agency to create local school solutions that resist the deleterious effects of educational inequality and urban disinvestment. Such agency and efficacy provide an example of liberation, hope, and opportunity for marginalized communities long engaged in the unending struggle against racism and inequality.

### **Research Questions**

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore the educational processes and approaches within a Black operated Seventh-day Adventist school. The following research questions are the focus of the study:

- RQ1: What are the factors that influence the academic, social, and cultural development of Black students attending a Black Seventh-day Adventist school?
- RQ2: To what extent, if any, do these academic, social, and cultural factors facilitate the liberation of Black students?
- RQ3: To what extent, if any, are elements of resistance occurring within this school?
- RQ4: How does the faith-based philosophy of this school contribute to the academic development and success of Black students?

### **Definitions, Delimitation, Limitations, and Positionality**

Definitions:

Several terms are worth defining to provide clarity on their use in the study:

*-academic development:* student growth in achievement and learning of core concepts and skills across a set of content areas including reading, language arts, mathematics, science, history, and social studies (Aronson and Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

*-achievement gap:* the differential in academic performance between students of varying racial, class, and gender categories as measured by standardized assessments or other school achievement data. The term reflects a focus on the educational outputs of students (Coleman, 1966).

*-Black:* racial ancestry descending from peoples of the African diaspora including African, African American, Afro-Caribbean, or Afro-Latin heritage (Manning, 2010)

*-Black Church:* the collection of American churches across denominations that are predominantly and historically Black in composition and leadership (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Mitchell, 2004; Raboteau, 1978; Wilmore, 2004;)

*-Black operated Seventh-day Adventist school:* these are schools within the Seventh-day Adventist organization that are overseen by Black administrators and educators serving a predominantly Black constituency and supported by Black Seventh-day Adventist churches (Baker, 2005, 2007; Hector, 2017; Reynolds, 1984; Rock, 2018).

*-cultural development:* student learning and appreciation of their own heritage and that of others in a manner that promotes positive self-concept, respect for others, and understanding

of their location within the global community (Akua, 2019; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2014).

*-faith-based school/faith-based education:* schools that are generally operated by religious communities and incorporate religious instruction within the educational experience. These educational models typically emphasize character development, ethical principles, religious values, and holistic learning in the education and socialization of its students (Jeynes, 2010; Knight, 2001; U.S. Domestic Policy Council, 2008; White, 1923, 1952).

*-liberation:* emancipation from oppression in its social, economic, political, cultural, and ideological forms especially as it relates to racism and White supremacy (Cone, 2003; Freire, 1970; Hopkins, 2004)

*-resistance:* the exertion of oppositional force against established ideology, knowledge, or power (Apple, 2008; Giroux, 1983)

*-opportunity gap:* the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities that perpetuate lower educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment for certain groups of students<sup>3</sup>. The term reflects a focus on the disparate social and economic investments or inputs into these students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2012).

*-social development:* the process by which students learn to interact with others around them including skills to communicate and process their actions, language skills, the development of

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<sup>3</sup> The Glossary of Education Reform. Retrieved on May 7, 2020 <https://www.edglossary.org/opportunity-gap/>

self-esteem and positive attitude, friendship development, the ability to resolve conflicts, and strengthened learning skills (Ruiz-Roman, Molina, and Alcaide, 2012).

*-White supremacy*: the union of political, economic, social, and ideological structures linked into an overall system that guarantees the power, position, and privilege of members of the White race (Bush, 1999, 2009; DuBois, 1994, 1998; Marable, 2000; Rodney 2014).

Delimitation:

This qualitative case study looks at 447 students in a Black operated Seventh-day Adventist preK-8 school. As the aim of qualitative inquiry is to facilitate understanding through rich description, findings of this study are not generalizable but may be transferrable to other contexts (Creswell, 2018). Results of this research identify liberatory educational approaches that are supportive of Black student learning. Findings also highlight how faith-based schools empower Black students for educational success.

Limitations:

Limitations to this research include asynchronous data collection. Although interview and focus group data are collected in the same school year, available test score data is used from the same school year as well as preceding academic years. Also, Black Adventist schools serve students that range from lower to middle class socio-economic family backgrounds. The school under investigation has a socio-economically diverse student body that also features students from middle class families, a composition that based on the literature may positively influence achievement results. Notwithstanding these limitations, an exploration of this school should yield valuable information on the intersection of race, class, faith, and education.

Researcher positionality:

The researcher is a Black male ordained clergy within the Seventh-day Adventist church with 19 years of professional experience and affiliation with Black operated Seventh-day Adventist schools. The researcher developed an interest in this topic as over the years he observed positive educational dynamics within these schools. The researcher's professional affiliation with Black operated Seventh-day Adventist schools is advantageous and in many ways an asset for research. However, it is acknowledged that this affiliation may also be a liability with regard to the risk of researcher bias. To mitigate such risk, the researcher employed safeguards including member checking interview and focus group data and employing an audit trail of data to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

In summary, many urban communities throughout America have been consigned to inferior schools and low educational outcomes. In light of this, Black Seventh-day Adventist churches have organized a network of schools nationwide to meet the need for quality educational environments in these communities. This qualitative case study explores a Black Seventh-day Adventist school to understand its influence on Black student learning and development. Findings from this study highlight the liberatory impact on Black student learning and the critical role such schools play in urban communities. The next chapter will review the relevant literature for this research.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

The review of the literature concerning race and education is organized into six key sections: 1) *achievement gaps vs. opportunity gaps*; 2) *culturally relevant education*; 3) *educational safe spaces*; 4) *faith and education*; 5) *Black liberation and Black Seventh-day Adventism*; and 6) *evidence on Black student learning and gaps in empirical research*. The first section, Achievement gaps vs. Opportunity gaps reviews the literature and its emphasis on the more appropriate opportunity gap framework. The next section surveys the literature on culturally relevant education and its influence on non-white students. Section three reviews the research documenting the in-school threats to Black student learning and achievement. The research on the positive influence of faith in the education of Black students is reviewed in section four. An historical context for liberation and Black Seventh-day Adventism is briefly summarized in the fifth section. And finally, the last section summarizes the literature, highlighting important research gaps that are generative for this study.

### Achievement Gaps vs. Opportunity Gaps

Much of the research in U.S. education over the past 70 years has focused on the differences in educational achievement between children of varying racial and economic backgrounds. Documented in the landmark Coleman report of 1966 Equality of Educational Opportunity, these racial and economic achievement differentials have persisted for decades into the present, are deeply entrenched within American society, and have become termed the “achievement gap” (Alexander and Morgan, 2016; Coleman, 1966; Downey and Condrón, 2016; Hill, et al., 2017; Jackson and Moffitt, 2017; Thorson and Gearhart, 2019). However, in the past 20 years, educational researchers have recognized the need to change the terminology that

describes these differences in achievement. A robust body of educational research over many decades documents that these academic differences are systemic in nature and are rooted in wider social inequities present within U.S. society. These researchers argue that the term “achievement gap” has led to problematic educational approaches that see deficits in students, their families, and communities rather than the unequal social system. These achievement differences are reflective of broader disinvestments and gaps in opportunity between groups in society. How the problematic of educational difference is conceptualized then becomes a critical basis for determining the appropriate approach toward educational research and policy. Some of the most salient research that utilizes this “opportunity framework” is summarized below.

H. Richard Milner IV in his research asserts that the achievement gap should be recontextualized within the larger frame of unequal social gaps, namely: the teacher quality gap, the teacher training gap, the challenging curriculum gap, the school funding gap, the digital divide gap, the employment opportunity gap, the wealth and income gap, the health care gap, the nutrition gap, the school integration gap, and the early childcare gap (Milner, 2013). He insists that standardization policies and practice incorrectly suggest that students come from homogenous environments with equal access to opportunity. This sameness agenda operates under the guise of a level playing field thereby disadvantaging urban students of color of lower economic status (Milner, 2013).

Milner challenges researchers to conceptualize their inquiries under the framework of “the opportunity gap” which examines the underlying causes for achievement disparities instead of merely reporting them (Milner, 2012). Milner identifies a five-tenet framework for explaining

and problematizing research in the area of educational disparities: a) color blindness, b) cultural conflicts, c) myth of meritocracy, d) low expectations and deficit mindsets, e) context-neutral mindsets. Educators that adopt color blind approaches can limit the learning of students of color by adopting curricula dominated by White contributions to the field of knowledge and White cultural norms while excluding the contributions and norms of other groups. Cultural conflicts or incongruence between educators and students can limit student's learning opportunities. Meritocratic perspectives can blind educators to properly understanding inequality of opportunity and the socio-economic constraints on students that cannot merely be countered by individual work ethic. Educators that have low expectations or deficit mindsets regarding their students do not challenge them with learning approaches that could heighten their achievement. Finally, educators and researchers must consider the larger social contexts that influence achievement (Milner, 2012). Milner's five tenets are useful for conceptualizing educational research.

Similarly looking at structural inequality, Darling-Hammond finds that the inequality in educational inputs supports unequal academic outcomes. Standardized measures that raise standards without equalizing funding have only served to *lessen* access to education for students of color (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Her policy recommendations advocate equalized educational funding per student across states and communities, reformed curricula, and investment in teachers. In harmony with these recommendations, Nancy Hill details how school choice and market-based approaches to educational equity are ineffective because they create winning and losing schools (Hill, 2017). These approaches focus on national standards,

testing, and competition, but distract from the greater need for larger investments of resource and equalized funding in disadvantaged communities (Hill, 2017).

Rowley and Wright in their longitudinal study suggest that differences in Black/White test scores were due to discrimination based on race as well as family factors outside the school setting (Rowley & Wright, 2011). They found that the best predictor of test scores was SES. Schools serving low income students should receive additional funding to overcome educational deficits. They advocate fully funding early education programs like Head Start as a means to improving achievement.

Looking at the achievement gap, Richard Rothstein casts a broader frame asserting that efforts to close achievement differentials that only focus on school policy and ignore social class characteristics that influence learning will fail. He explains that collective characteristics of social class differences inevitably influence academic achievement (Rothstein, 2004:106). He asserts, "Most of the difference between the average performance of black children and that of white children can probably be traced to differences in their social class characteristics" (Rothstein, 2004:106).

Although he recommends several policy prescriptions to mitigate racial and economic differences in achievement, Rothstein underscores a critical and fundamental conclusion, that is, we "must reform social and economic institutions if we want children to emerge with equal preparation" (Rothstein, 2004:109). "Incomes have become more unequally distributed in the United States in the last generation, and this inequality contributes to the academic achievement gap" (Rothstein, 2004:110).

Gloria Ladson-Billings assesses that the achievement gap must be analyzed in the context of historical, economic, and moral debts owed by the US to communities that have been historically marginalized and exploited. These exploitative actions have harmed the educational prospects of people of color and hence collectively comprise an educational debt owed by society to these communities (Ladson-Billings, 2006:5). She points to the lack of parity in funding that results in wealthier school districts receiving more funds to educate their children than poorer districts (Ladson-Billings, 2006:9). She cites Rothstein and Wilder who contend that social inequalities like health care, early childhood experience, economic security, and other factors are contributory and cumulative to educational disparities and make it almost impossible to close these gaps in achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2006:10). She argues that addressing these social gaps in opportunity represent a more comprehensive and effective approach to remedying educational inequality.

Robert Evans explains how the achievement gap transcends the classroom and has roots that extend well beyond school-based strategies and programs (Evans, 2005). He cites Robinson and Brandon, 1994, that “90% of the variance in student’s math scores on some tests can be predicted without knowing anything about their schools; One only needs to know the number of parents in the home, the level of the parents’ education, the type of community in which the family lives, and the state’s poverty rate.” Evans points to data which indicates that the achievement gap begins well before kindergarten (Evans, 2005). He also points out that much of the achievement gap grows over the summer and not during the school year (Evans, 2005). Evans’ research suggests that schools *reflect* disparities already present in society more than shape them.

Eric Grodsky similarly found that standardized test scores consistently vary by socio-economic status as reflected by parental education and family income (Grodsky, 2008). He observed that a part of racial group achievement differences was due to socio-economic differences across groups. Grodsky concludes that access to opportunity is the “linchpin of social stratification in education” (Grodsky, 2008).

In discussing solutions to the achievement gap, Pedro Noguera identifies the reduction of poverty and racial segregation, equalizing funding between middle class and poor schools, lowering class size, and hiring qualified and competent teachers as factors that positively influence the academic performance of students (Noguera, 2008).

In their analysis of education differentials, Richard Breen and J. Goldthorpe found that children of more advantaged backgrounds performed better on average than children of less advantaged backgrounds on standardized tests and examinations (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Sean Reardon similarly addressed this matter demonstrating that the SES of a child’s parent is one of the strongest predictors of the child’s academic achievement and educational attainment (Reardon, 2011). He points out that the income-achievement gap is larger than the Black-White achievement gap, a reflection of the growth of income inequality over the past 40 years. Similarly, George Farkas concludes that black-white differences in social class, family structure, and child rearing practices account for much of the achievement test gap (Farkas, 2004). Farkas observed that much of the test score gap disappears when SES is accounted for.

Looking at home based variables, the literature suggests that parents play a vital role in impacting the academic success of their children. Vincent Roscigno observes, “Parents’

education is consistently influential for achievement” (Roscigno, 1998). “Teachers reported significantly higher academic achievement among students not living in poverty, European American students, and students with more educated parents” (Lee & Bowen, 2006). The educational level of the parent as well as their socio-economic status are indispensable variables in student achievement.

However, not only is parent educational status important, but parent involvement makes a difference in student achievement. Parent involvement is consistently associated with higher achievement (Hayes, 2012). Parent home-based involvement has been shown to positively impact adolescent academic achievement (Hayes, 2012).

Future educational research must then affirm these long documented social inequities that inform academic differences between groups. Opportunity frameworks recognize the problem of disinvestment of groups and communities as underlying in-school academic disparities. The literature suggests that more appropriate educational research approaches will investigate ways to invest in children and marginalized communities that are supportive of their learning and development. Ways to mitigate gaps in opportunity through investment then become an empirically useful framework for inquiry and research conceptualization.

### **Culturally Relevant Education**

When considering how to educate Black students more effectively, research documents the benefits of incorporating cultural knowledge and cultural sensitivity in the pedagogy and practice of the educator. Following the desegregation efforts of the 60s and 70s, a new

educational movement developed that focused on the learning needs of diverse students. The concept of culturally relevant education (CRE) began to emerge in academic literature and developed along two strands: *culturally responsive teaching* and *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Aronson and Laughter, 2016:163). Geneva Gay became the seminal academic contributor for culturally responsive teaching, a concept that focused on teacher practice, competency, and methods. Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the concept “culturally relevant pedagogy” which focused on teacher posture and paradigm, attitudes and dispositions. These two strands comprise the concept of culturally relevant education (Dover, 2013). The following is a brief summary of their work as well as a review of the empirical research around culturally relevant education.

Gay explains that culturally responsive teaching aims to use “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010:31). Aronson and Laughter advance six dimensions of culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Culturally responsive teachers 1) empower students both socially and academically by setting high expectations and being committed to the success of every student, 2) use a multidimensional approach that incorporates cultural knowledge, student experiences, contributions, and perspectives into the learning environment, 3) affirm student culture and use different instructional strategies and multicultural curricula to bridge gaps between school and home, 4) aim to educate the whole child through a socially, emotionally, and politically comprehensive approach, 5) are agents of transformation who build on and apply student strengths to direct instruction, assessment, and curricular design, 6) are emancipatory and liberatory from

traditional practices and ideologies in education that oppress students from non-white and marginalized communities (Aronson and Laughter, 2016:165). CRT aims to eliminate deficit perspectives of children and communities, replacing them with empowering perspectives (Gay, 2010).

Ladson-Billings defines culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) as one “that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994:16, 17). She expounds on several approaches of culturally relevant pedagogy. CRP aims for real student learning by determining what students know and are able to do (as opposed to teaching to a test). It focuses on building cultural competence ensuring that students know and understand their culture within the wider context of global cultures. She assesses that such cultural competence assists students in better navigating the multiple oppressions of their social context (Aronson and Laughter, 2016:166). CRP invests students with socio-political consciousness, providing them with tools for analysis, reflection, and critique of their world. Ladson-Billings defines the core elements of culturally relevant pedagogy as being a combination of cultural competence, academic achievement (student learning), and socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006). Using Ladson-Billings’ concept, Dover explains that “culturally relevant educators explicitly unmask and unmake oppressive systems through the critique of discourses of power” (Dover, 2013).

Empirical evidence of the benefits of CRE within schools has been documented in research across academic content areas (mathematics, science, history, social studies, and English language arts):

### *CRE in Mathematics*

Hubert found that students participating in culturally relevant math lessons increased their achievement by one letter grade and expressed more confidence taking state assessments (Hubert, 2013). Langlie found that Black and Latino students achieved higher scores on standardized tests when culturally relevant methods were used in the classroom (Langlie, 2008). Fulton observed that CRE methods resulted in students having a deeper understanding of math content as well as developing a value in listening to different perspectives (Fulton, 2009).

### *CRE in Science*

Atwater, Russell, and Butler note that “students of color, primarily from underrepresented and traditionally underrepresented groups are rarely able to see themselves in science or see how science is relevant to their daily lives in science classrooms” (Atwater, Russell, and Butler, 2014). Johnson’s study on CRE within schools found that such approaches led to increased student motivation toward science and created a more effective instructional environment (Johnson, 2011). Similarly, Dimick found that CRE within classroom scientific investigations resulted in students experiencing both academic and political empowerment, and becoming more engaged in scientific learning (Dimick, 2012).

### *CRE in History & Social Studies*

Ladson-Billings states that there is a “discourse of invisibility” for non-white students in traditional history curriculums (Ladson-Billings, 2003). This invisibility impacts non-white student’s ability and motivation to engage the material. Epstein’s study, however,

demonstrated that CRE in social studies can help students think critically about race and power in U.S. history (Epstein, et al., 2011). Also using CRE in social studies, Choi found that this approach appealed emotionally to students and enhanced their academic achievement, while providing a safe space to critique knowledge (Choi, 2013). Employing tenets of CRE, Martell observed that non-white students were better able to connect to history, providing more equitable and effective learning opportunities for students (Martell, 2013).

### *CRE in English Language Arts*

Caballero's study noted a significant relationship between student's perceptions of teachers who used CRE and academic growth in ELA (Caballero, 2010). Similarly, Civil and Kahn found that student engagement increased in ELA classrooms where CRE materials were utilized (Civil and Kahn, 2001).

The literature documents where CRE approaches have resulted in "positive impacts on affective domains often correlated with higher test scores" (Aronson and Laughter, 2016:197). These domains include: increase in student motivation, increase in student interest in content, increase in student ability to engage content area discourses, increase in student perceptions of themselves as capable learners, increase in confidence when taking standardized assessments. "These increases in affective domains represent gains in real academic skills and concepts that correlate with more important goals geared toward becoming life long learners" (Aronson and Laughter, 2016:197).

The research demonstrates that the infusion of cultural knowledge and relevance within the learning environment is beneficial to Black and Brown students. Lomotey provides

explanation for these outcomes, “Part of enabling students to see themselves in the curriculum is allowing them to observe at work those educators and other professionals who share their cultural background. This has long been shown to have a positive effect on children’s self concept and their sense of their own capacity to be successful” (Lomotey, 1992). Akua argues that traditional or normative educational approaches are designs that are “plagued by curriculums of exclusion and cultural confusion, savage inequalities, disproportionate funding, access and opportunity gaps, and rampant underachievement” (Akua, 2019). He explains that excellence and authenticity demand an Afrocentric approach to support the learning of Black children. Similarly, Shockley contends that a culturally relevant approach is supportive of the learning needs and outcomes of Black children (Shevalier and McKenzie, 2012; Shockley, 2015). The absence of culturally relevant knowledge within curricula deny Black children from developing their true cultural identity (Shockley, 2008), in essence creating a double alienation from both themselves and the system of education itself. Taken together, these empirical insights present a firm platform and justification for investigating cultural relevance within Black schools. Inasmuch as this study is looking at how a Black operated Seventh-day Adventist school supports the development of Black students, inquiry on cultural relevance will necessarily be a component of this study.

### **Educational Safe Spaces**

Because racism and inequality are ubiquitous in U.S. society, their effects are also suffused throughout the American educational system (Anyon, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2018;

Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Grusky, 2014; Manning, 2000; Massey and Denton, 1993; Omi and Winant, 2015). Within educational contexts, racism often manifests itself through latent or covert means known as microaggressions. Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007:272). Microaggressions are comprised of three categories: *microassaults*, *microinsults*, and *microinvalidations* (Sue et al., 2007). Microassaults are explicit racially prejudiced behaviors intended to harm, ridicule, isolate, or discriminate against a victim. Microinsults are indirect behaviors that betray stereotypical beliefs. This includes insensitivity to racial or ethnic heritage. Microinvalidations are behaviors that negate the validity of lived experiences and perspectives of racial or ethnic minorities (Sue et al., 2007).

Researchers have organized microaggressions into 11 thematic categories: “alien in one’s own land, ascription of intelligence, color blindness, assumption of criminality, denial of individual racism, myth of meritocracy, pathologizing cultural values and styles, second class status, environmental invalidation, simultaneous invisibility and hypervisibility, and exoticization and objectification” (Derthick, David, Saw, and Okazaki, 2014; Sue et al., 2007). These microaggressions are operationalized within schools and harm racial and ethnic minority students who are frequently the target. Indeed, much research documents the negative impacts of white teacher bias, punitive behavioral approaches, low teacher expectations and attitudes, and other microaggressions that harm Black students in traditional educational settings. Keels, Durkee, and Hope found that “racially ethnically hostile educational contexts are detrimental for students’ academic achievement and mental health” (Keels, Durkee, and

Hope, 2017). Furthermore, they note that exposure to microaggressions can negatively influence students' academic, emotional, and identity development. Because of these realities, Black students need nurturing and affirming educational environments or "*safe spaces*" that shield them from the deleterious effects of in-school racism. The following is a brief summary of the relevant research regarding teacher expectations, beliefs, attitudes, race, bias, and school behavior management approaches, and their impact on Black students.

Amanda Williams asserts that remedying the achievement gap by centering the analysis on school-based variables focuses on what educators can do inside the school (Williams, 2011). She identifies small class sizes, standards-based practice in math and science, de-tracking students according to educational ability, teacher expectations, the use of mentors, and college preparation as in school strategies that can heighten student achievement. She also encourages schools to confront teachers in the area of teacher beliefs and attitudes as this variable has a measurable impact on student achievement (Williams, 2011).

Love and Kruger in their study identified teacher belief measures that correlated with higher student achievement (Love and Kruger, 2005). They found that teachers in six urban schools serving African American children who endorsed beliefs regarding the classroom as a communal learning environment, the success of all students, teaching as giving back to the community, and the importance of student's ethnicity (in contrast to color-blind beliefs), evidenced higher student achievement. They also cite that successful teachers of African American students: a) draw on African culture and history, b) promote the location of self in an historical and cultural context, c) help students create new knowledge based on life experience, and d) treat knowledge and learning as reciprocal (Love and Kruger, 2005).

In her study, Allision Moore found that there was a statistically significant relationship between the racial congruence of school personnel and students' reading and math achievement (Moore, 2017). Her study suggests that student achievement increases when students attend schools where school personnel are racially similar to them (Moore, 2017). She concludes that the number of minority educator hires must increase in schools that have a greater share of minority students.

In a prior study, Oates found that teacher perceptions of students vary by both the race of the teacher and the race of the student. The dissonance of the White teacher-Black student context revealed that White teachers reliably demonstrated negative perceptions of Black students (Oates, 2003). The fact that these negative perceptions of African American students by White teachers exist and that these perceptions are consequential in African American student achievement means that the racially dissonant arrangement may exacerbate the problem of low achievement and vulnerability amongst this student population (Oates, 2003).

Similarly, Downey and Pribesh observed, "The strain between Black students and White teachers is evident as soon as Black children begin kindergarten" (Downey and Pribesh, 2004). Black students are consistently rated as poorer classroom citizens than White students by White teachers. However, Black student behavior is rated *more* favorably when the teacher is Black (Downey and Pribesh, 2004). Patrick McGrady and John Reynolds also observed that Black students received more negative ratings by White teachers (McGrady and Reynolds, 2013).

Teacher bias was also measured in Linda van Den Bergh's study which found that an implicit measure of teacher bias was a strong predictor of teacher expectations and student achievement (van Den Bergh, 2010). She observed that negative teacher attitudes as measured by an implicit attitude assessment corresponded with lower student performance. Prejudiced teacher attitudes are important in the differential expectations of students and their achievement. The results of her study suggest that more attention must be given to the impact of teacher attitudes and bias on student academic performance. In a similar study using a multi-analytic framework, Peterson found that students' reading scores correlated with teachers' explicit expectations (Peterson, 2016). She also observed that teachers' implicit prejudiced attitudes correlated with students' math scores. Her findings demonstrated that students achieve more when a teacher's implicit prejudice favors their ethnicity (Peterson, 2016). Taken together, these studies collectively underscore the importance of racial diversity amongst educational staff and the critical role Black teachers play in positively affecting the academic experience of Black students.

Several studies also highlight the impact of in-school behavioral management approaches on Black students. Hilary Lustick examined restorative practices in urban public school settings and observed that a leading contributing factor to racial achievement differences is the *racial discipline gap* (Lustick, 2017:2). She notes that school practices disproportionately punish Black and Brown students. Suspension and surveillance are disproportionately deployed on students of color in urban schools, reflecting larger societal efforts to sort and control minority populations. She asserts that urban school discipline reform is still focused on the student as opposed to educating teachers, administrators, and staff on

their own biases, beliefs, and behaviors that lead to harsh discipline on Black and Brown students (Lustick, 2017).

She acknowledges that restorative practices correlate with lower suspension rates but contends that this lowers *White* student suspensions (Lustick, 2017:2). Black and Brown students in urban schools are still suspended or receive “restorative discipline”. She explains that “restorative practices” in urban schools still reproduce patterns of surveillance and control on students of color. She argues that when restorative practices are employed by “traditional intellectuals” and White teachers/administrators, they are still used to maintain the status quo of racial oppression and inequality. Although this may not be the intention, it is the result. Lustick concludes that restorative practices can only be effective if teachers, administrators, and staff are challenged to confront their own biases and change institutional culture (Lustick, 2017:24).

Mara Schiff in her study examines whether restorative justice approaches in schools can disrupt the school to prison pipeline. She maintains that the possibilities of restorative approaches will be unfulfilled if school organizational structures are not challenged and reformed (Schiff, 2018:121). Restorative justice as an alternative to punitive discipline can reduce racial disparities in school discipline. However, organizational and cultural obstacles must be removed to facilitate this. Schiff details how the increasing popularity of restorative practices emerged recently as a result of several factors. 1) Zero tolerance policies have shown no evidence in making schools safer, increasing academic achievement, or improving student in-school success. 2) Research documents the large racial disparity in the administering of discipline. 3) Federal initiatives have helped promote the use of restorative justice principles.

Some guiding values of restorative justice are: inclusion, respect, fairness, tolerance, and acceptance. Schiff admonishes that we must consider the political, cultural, and policy contexts of restorative justice initiatives. Institutional bias and structural racism must be challenged for restorative practices to be effective and to mitigate school to prison pipeline processes (Schiff, 2018:134).

David Karp and Beau Breslin look at restorative justice in school communities. They assert that restorative practice in schools is a more appropriate educational approach than traditional punitive approaches that do harm to individuals and communities (Karp & Breslin, 2001:266). Their study observed three schools' implementation of restorative justice practices. They observed that restorative practices were used in the schools to resolve differences. Some schools utilized community group conferences or circles as a response to misbehavior. In another school they observed restorative practice served as an alternative form of conflict resolution and not a broader comprehensive approach that looked to reform school institutional culture and practice. In the third school, restorative practices were occurring daily in the school "in every classroom involving virtually every relationship" (Karp & Breslin, 2001:268). In this school, the organizational mission centered around education, rehabilitation, and support. The principals of restoration and re-integration were more central in this school.

Karp and Breslin also found commonalities in the three schools under study. They took a collective approach to reflecting on behavior and seeking solutions that repair instead of harm. This approach looked to reconnect marginalized groups. Also, in these schools, solutions were collectively determined. This approach is transformative for students and allows them to learn about the impact of personal behavior and their responsibility to the wider community

(Karp & Breslin, 2001:268). Hence, restorative justice practices when implemented properly hold the possibility of disrupting the school to prison pipeline in Black and Brown communities by discontinuing institutional approaches that criminalize and punish minority students in educational environments (Quimby, 2021). In this sense, restorative approaches become a tool in the hand of the critical educator to resist oppressive institutional school processes and liberate groups that have been oppressed by them.

In summary, the literature reveals that when Black students arrive at school, they face a myriad of racial obstacles and hostilities that negatively influence their ability to achieve. Their academic trajectories are influenced by teacher bias, low teacher expectations, teacher attitudes and beliefs, and punitive behavior management approaches. To affirmatively support Black student learning and development, educators then must directly contend with these pernicious in-school realities. Whereas these racial inequities and microaggressions negatively impact Black student achievement, schools and educators that create equitable and affirming learning environments that both protect and nurture Black students may evidence positive achievement results. The literature demonstrates that Black students need *educational safe spaces* that empower them to learn, thrive, and achieve.

### **Faith and Education**

Over the decades, researchers in education have consistently found that religion plays a significant role in academic achievement. The personal religious faith of the student, the student's religious involvement, and the religious faith and involvement of parents have all been evidenced to have a positive influence on in-school student performance. This

heightened achievement is especially pronounced for Black and Brown students. The research also documents a positive effect size for religious or faith-based schools and student achievement. Some of the notable studies in this literature are herein briefly reviewed.

In his meta-analysis of 30 studies centered on mitigating racial achievement disparities, William Jeynes' study identified personal religious faith as having the highest effect size (.35 or 35%) on achievement for Latinos and African Americans (Jeynes, 2015). His study also found that religious-oriented schools yielded a statistically significant effect size of .16 which meant these schools reduced the achievement gap by 16%. Family factors and curriculum changes also both yielded a significant effect of .22. This study suggests that faith (both in the school and outside the school) plays a significant role in mitigating racial achievement disparities. In a prior study he found that personal religious commitment reduced the gap by 50%, while attending a religious school reduced the gap by 25% (Jeynes, 2010). For African American students of faith with "intact" family structures, the gap disappeared completely (Jeynes, 2010). He asserts, "It is important for American leaders and educators to draw from the cultural strengths of people of color in order for the achievement gap to be alleviated. It would appear that religious faith is likely among these strengths... If religious faith helps African American youth succeed its influence should be embraced and appreciated rather than overlooked and disparaged" (Jeynes, 2010). In his 2014 study, Jeynes again found that "Faith based schools reduce the achievement gap by approximately 25% or more even when one adjusts for socioeconomic status" (Jeynes, 2014). He further observed that the results indicate the socioeconomic achievement gap is approximately 25% narrower at faith-based schools than

public schools. His findings suggest that religious schools play an important role in reducing racial achievement disparities.

Continuing the research on faith-based school achievement, Elissa Kido and Jerome Thayer looked at the role of Seventh-day Adventist schools in student achievement finding that students within Adventist schools were outperforming their peers nationally in both public and private schools (Thayer & Kido, 2012). Students scored higher on achievement tests than the norm group. Additionally, the longer students were in the Adventist system, the higher they achieved compared to the norm group. Thayer and Kido observed an academic advantage for students within the Adventist school system relative to their norm group peers (Thayer & Kido, 2012).

Madyun and Lee document that parents involved in religious service attendance with their child have a greater frequency and volume of school-related conversations (Madyun and Lee, 2010). They assert that these school-related conversations are an important component for strengthening educational outcomes. Religious involvement increases the social capital of these families through a process of “intergenerational closure” (an adult-child communal network) that shares information and can heighten achievement outcomes (Madyun and Lee, 2010). Black families gain exposure and access to these networks by attending religious services (Madyun and Lee, 2010). Madyun and Lee’s findings speak to the impact that Black churches play in supporting families and strengthening educational outcomes.

Having found that religious involvement is the most effective predictor of positive educational outcomes for Black students (Barrett, 2009), Barrett’s qualitative analysis examined

ways the Black church may be instrumental in improving and supporting positive academic development for these students (Barrett, 2010). He found that the church can assist congregants in developing a critical consciousness in the areas of educational equity. He argues that the church can help promote an educational activism that affirms Black student achievement through celebration, promote educational excellence as a social norm, and serve as a source of social, cultural, and economic capital for families of school age children (Barrett, 2010). “It was concluded that religious socialization reinforces attitudes, outlooks, behaviors, and practices among students, shaping—particularly through individuals' commitment to and adoption of the goals and expectations of the group—a habitus conducive to positive educational outcomes” (Barrett, 2010).

McCray, Grant, and Beachum propound that the Black church as an historical institution has maintained a cultural ethos of resistance to racial hostility that has served as an alternative source of social capital for Black students and aided in their development of self-efficacy (McCray, Grant, and Beachum, 2010). They define self-efficacy as a process of self-actualization, psychosocial competence, and capability that is often nurtured by the supportive habitus and affirming racial socialization existent within the Black church. They assert that since the Black church has historically served as a safe and supportive space for African Americans, as a social institution embedded within the community it can play a role in educational activism and reducing achievement disparities (McCray, Grant, and Beachum, 2010). By partnering with school leaders and stakeholders, the Black church can ensure that school educators reflect culturally relevant leadership that is understanding, responsive, and supportive of the cultural and social needs of students of color. As a social institution serving African Americans, the

Black church can also facilitate the pedagogy of self-development, grounding Black students in self-realization and self-assertion.

Consistent with this research, Al-Fadhli and Kersen found that family social capital and religious social capital were the strongest predictors of African American student's college ambitions and future goals (Al-Fadhli and Kersen, 2010). They found that students with a higher level of cultural capital had a more positive assessment of their past year's academic performance. They suggest that African American students with an active religious life, involved parents, and an active social life have greater opportunity and life choices.

Toldson and Anderson similarly found that Black students who participated in religious activities and had stronger religious convictions were more likely to report higher grades, positive self-concept, positive feelings about school, parent involvement, and lower incidence of school discipline (Toldson and Anderson, 2010). They found that participation in religious activities had a stronger influence on academic performance. They prescribe that Black churches leverage their influence to improve academic outcomes by providing incentives for students who do well, intervene for students who are suspended, teach parents the importance of education, provide homework assistance for students, bolster student self-concepts, and champion a commitment to education (Toldson and Anderson, 2010). They argue that together these actions could improve Black student achievement.

Consistent with these studies, Byfield in her qualitative analysis found that religion was a contributory factor to positive educational achievement for Black male students (Byfield, 2008). Her study revealed that both the religious beliefs and religious communities of these

students had a significant influence on their academic development and achievement. Their Black churches provided them with social, cultural, and religious capital which they leveraged toward educational success. Her study comports with the literature that suggests a positive link between religious engagement and academic achievement.

That educational researchers over several decades have observed significant positive effects for faith as a variable influencing achievement is a finding demanding ongoing attention and analysis. However, remarkably, these findings are not often elevated in many educational policy and practice considerations. Continuing research needs to build on this body of evidence by documenting *how* faith influences student achievement. Additionally, are there cumulative or additive effects for faith and achievement? That is, do students of faith, in faith-based homes, with active religious involvement, attending faith-based schools, evidence heightened achievement when compared to their peers? These present research possibilities for both quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Therefore, whereas low academic achievement amongst Black and Brown students and their communities is the problem, then religious faith as a documented positive variable impacting achievement is manifestly a part of the solution.

### **Black Liberation and Black Seventh-day Adventism**

Political resistance and struggle for liberation have been the four centuries long engagement of people of African descent within the United States (DuBois, 1994; Franklin, 1994; Quarles, 1987). Fifty years ago, this struggle was given its clearest theological voice, expression, and systematic framing in the form of Black liberation theology (Cone, 2003; Hopkins, 2004). First articulated by James Cone in 1970, Black liberation theology fuses the

ethos of the Black revolutionary struggle with the core liberatory ethic of the Christian gospel. Wyman in describing this theology assesses, “Black theology today uses humanities and social science insights to deconstruct race while constructing around a doctrinal Christian framework in order to represent faith from the perspective of Black experience and in a way that demands the full liberation and recognized humanity of people of colour, the poor, the marginalized and oppressed” (Wyman, 2018). Cone’s analysis gave formal theological treatment to emancipatory strivings long embodied within the Black church tradition for generations (Ansbro, 2000; Burton, 2007; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Mitchell, 2004; Raboteau, 1978; Wilmore, 2004). It is this tradition of liberation from racism and White supremacy that has historically guided the Black church in its establishment of its own institutions, churches, and schools.

Black Seventh-day Adventism is no exception to this liberatory tradition. The Seventh-day Adventist church is a worldwide Protestant Christian denomination of over 21 million members<sup>4</sup>. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Seventh-day Adventist church has operated its own faith-based school system with now over 7,500 schools in 150 countries serving 1.5 million students, one of the largest Christian educational systems in the world<sup>5</sup> (Knight, 1990, 2001; White, 1923, 1952). Birthed out of the Millerite religious movement of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century America, Seventh-day Adventism grew up in the socio-historical milieu of the Civil War. The earliest Adventists were very much socially progressive, many of whom were among the ranks of the abolitionist movement (Baker, 2005, 2007; Rock, 2018; Reynolds, 1984). Though Blacks

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.adventist.org/articles/seventh-day-adventist-world-church-statistics-2018/> Retrieved on October 16, 2020

<sup>5</sup> Adventist Education statistics. Retrieved May 6, 2020 <https://adventisteducation.org/abt.html>

were a part of the earliest adherents and participated in full religious communion with northern White Adventists, toward the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, conservatizing influences including the rise of Jim Crow ultimately ensured that the color line would extend into the church organization. For over the next half century, Black Seventh-day Adventists would hold faith in a denomination that accommodated racial segregation (Baker, 2005; Hector, 2017; Morgan, 2020; Rock, 2018).

Amidst this hostile racial climate, Black Seventh-day Adventist clergy and members (with the endorsement of the Adventist church) organized regional districts or “conferences” that provided them the autonomy to establish their own churches, schools, and ministry centers in urban communities across the nation while remaining within the broader organizational structure of the Adventist church (Baker, 2005; Hector, 2017; Morgan, 2020; Rock, 2018). Though unideal, this structural organization enabled Black Seventh-day Adventists to service their communities free from the scourge of ecclesiastical White prejudice. Black Seventh-day Adventism under its regional structure today comprises over 325,000 members with over 75 primary and secondary schools servicing thousands of students in urban communities across the nation. This historical recounting in brief represents the struggle for liberation and self-determination within Black Seventh-day Adventism. Black operated Seventh-day Adventist schools were established within the context of these racial realities and today remain rooted in these historical foundations of resistance and liberation.

### **Evidence on Black Student Learning and Gaps in Empirical Research**

The literature suggests that religious faith as a variable positively influences Black student achievement (Barrett, 2009, 2010; Jeynes, 2010, 2014, 2015; Thayer and Kido, 2012). This is

supported by studies that found that religious belief and activity had a positive effect on Black student achievement (Byfield, 2008; Madyun and Lee, 2010; Toldson and Anderson, 2010). Although these studies document the significant influence of faith on Black student achievement, there is comparatively little contemporary research on Black faith-based schools. Surprisingly, in the past 10 years Jeynes' findings have not prompted vigorous investigation of Black faith-based schools by educational researchers. More research is needed that explores and documents the influence of faith on Black student learning in Black faith-based educational environments. Such research is needed to add to the literature on faith and Black student learning, elevate the unheard voices, perspectives, and processes within these schools, and investigate the role these schools play within marginalized communities.

Secondly, although culturally relevant education (CRE) is an expanding area of educational research, policy, and practice, more research is needed to both document its influence on Black student learning and build on the body of evidence of its use in primary and secondary school contexts. Inasmuch as CRE represents a liberatory framework from traditional White educational frameworks and curricula that harm non-white students by "invisibilizing" them and their cultures in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2006), continued research in this area is needed to draw attention to CRE in Black and Brown contexts and build more awareness for its need across the field of education.

Thirdly, over sixty years of research has identified the so called "achievement gap" with an endless list of policy prescriptions to mitigate it. Yet these racial achievement disparities have remained largely impervious to over six decades of educational policy and practice. In light of this failure, educational research that employs an opportunity gap framework is a new

and necessary approach that shifts the focus to remedying social inequality and making necessary *investments* into marginalized students and their communities (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Evans, 2005; Farkas, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013; Rothstein, 2004; Rowley and Wright, 2011). Instead of making false comparisons between Black students and other racial student groups that receive greater social investment, far more research is needed that explores how to bolster social, economic, and educational investments into Black students to heighten their learning and achievement. Future educational research must explore how to effectively raise the level of investment and support for Black students. Such is the intent of this study.

Fourthly, educational research on Black Seventh-day Adventist schools and student learning is sorely lacking. Even more so, sociological inquiry into Black Seventh-day Adventist schools is virtually non-existent. This study aims to fill these gaps in denominational research.

Finally, the research documents a number of factors including teacher expectations, teacher-student racial congruence, teacher attitudes and beliefs, behavioral management approaches, and student's religious faith and activity, among many others that impact Black student achievement. These areas provide a basis for qualitative inquiry to determine whether these same factors or others are at work within Black Seventh-day Adventist schools.

Using the established literature as a guide, this study explored the four research questions outlined in chapter one. RQ1- What are the factors that influence the academic, social, and cultural development of Black students attending a Black Seventh-day Adventist school? RQ2- To what extent, if any, do these academic, social, and cultural factors facilitate

the liberation of Black students? RQ3- To what extent, if any, are elements of resistance occurring within this school? And RQ4- how does the faith-based philosophy of this school contribute to the academic development and success of Black students?

The next chapter will examine the theoretical framework of Critical Pedagogy Theory and the key theoretical concepts of this study.

### Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

#### **Theoretical framework:** *Critical Pedagogy Theory: Reproduction, Resistance, and Transformation*

Critical Pedagogy or Critical Educational theory is a theoretical frame that is useful in conceptualizing and analyzing the complex interrelationships of race, class, and education, and the differential distribution of privilege and disadvantage across American society. A seminal thinker whose work was in many respects foundational to this perspective was Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. In his classic text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's critical social analysis dissects the dynamics between privileged groups in society (oppressors) and disadvantaged groups (oppressed). Writhing under a totalizing system of socio-economic and cultural domination, the oppressed must break free from normative educational frames that sustain their oppression and adopt an emancipatory pedagogy that advances their liberation. He states, "This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation" (Freire, 1970:48).

Freire looks at the processes of domination and subordination within society and develops a central thesis that these processes are actually pedagogies, taught and learned approaches to social organization that embody both rule and resistance. Oppressor pedagogies are centered around dominance, and oppressed pedagogies are centered around resistance. Freire coins the term "conscientizacao" or critical consciousness as one's learning to perceive the social, political, and economic contradictions and take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 2018:35). However, "When the oppressed adopt individualistic

consciousness, they aim for the material benefits of liberation over the liberation of a class of people” (Freire, 2018:46).

Freire teaches that education must be the practice of freedom instead of the practice of domination functioning as a process of inquiry and not a closed system of authoritarianism (Freire, 2018:86). The revolutionary educator then must engage students in critical thinking, encouraging them to both locate themselves in the total order of society and challenge it.

In all, Freire articulates an expansive theory for liberation from systems of domination. This liberation is effected through a pedagogy that lifts the consciousness of the oppressed through critical reflection and praxis. Such pedagogy is dialogical utilizing the tools of cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis and action as the resistance to oppressive pedagogies of conquest, division, manipulation, and cultural invasion (Freire, 2018). Freire’s theory of pedagogy articulates the ideological frames and tactics of oppressor systems and presents a substantive theory of anti-oppressive action for oppressed and dominated groups to achieve their liberation. He adeptly describes the processes of domination and the impacts of such domination on the consciousness of its subjects. Only through the development of critical consciousness do the oppressed activate their agency to transform their conditions (Freire, 2018).

Hence, critical pedagogy theory views education through a liberatory framework that affirms the agency of oppressed groups to resist their oppression. It emphasizes the need to recognize and challenge the traditional claims that the educational system and its institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity

(Suoranta, 2006). As a socially liberatory frame, critical pedagogy advocates strategies that work toward the elimination of subordination based on race, class, and gender. It contests hegemonic institutions and dominant ideologies that affirm political-economic control in the hands of the white, rich, and powerful (McLaren, 2005). Critical pedagogy engages in the struggle for human freedom and social transformation and is therefore always political (unmasking power relations) and resisting social and economic inequalities endemic to capitalism (Apple, 2008; Bigelow, 1990; Giroux, 1983).

Critical pedagogy theory recognizes the social and cultural reproductive functions of schooling in capitalist society that allocate groups to distinct economic positions (Anyon, 1980, 1997; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Consequently, it aims to elevate marginalized groups within these societies. It “views critical revolutionary multiculturalism and pedagogy as the political basis for a radical transformation of education and society” (Eryaman, 2006:7). In this respect, critical pedagogy operates in the same missional tradition of sociologist and social critic, W.E.B. Du Bois who asserted that “Education and work are the levers to uplift a people” (Du Bois, 1903, 1983).

The theoretical literature within the critical pedagogy frame can be organized into three substantive areas: theories of reproduction, theories of resistance, and theories of transformation. These three areas are now briefly discussed.

### ***Reproduction***

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in their analysis of the U.S. educational system assert that the inequalities seen within it are rooted in the broader economic order of society. Seeing

the Coleman Report of 1966 as indicative of the failures of liberal education reform, Bowles and Gintis argue that educational policy as a means to ameliorate social inequality is limited within the framework of the market economy (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:20). The inequalities within U.S. education necessarily flow from the unequal economic arrangements of U.S. society itself.

They contend that the root of educational inequality for Black communities “lies outside of education, in a system of economic power and privilege in which racial distinctions play an important role”. Their conclusion is that education in the U.S. is highly unequal and substantially dependent on race and parental economic status (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:35). From a purposive lens they contend that the educational system serves to **reproduce** economic inequality by “legitimizing the allocation of individuals to economic positions” (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:123). Schools cycle students into stratified positions within the occupational hierarchy. In this way the educational system becomes a center of social reproduction that perpetuates the structure of racial and class privilege within society (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:11, 85).

Louis Althusser similarly explains the processes of social reproduction within market societies. He asserts that the capitalist school system ensures that a new generation of future workers are properly trained to take up their places in the class division of labor (Althusser, 2014:50). Schools are centers of training and purveyors of the dominant ideologies necessary for social conformity and the reproduction of the capitalist social system. This system is held in place by a dominant cultural hegemony taught in schools that wields a powerful influence over the population (Althusser, 2014).

## **Resistance**

In looking at educational theory, critical scholar Henry Giroux highlights the nexus between ideology, knowledge, and power. He notes, “Power distributed in a society functions in the interests of specific ideologies and forms of knowledge to sustain the economic and political concerns of particular groups and classes” (Young and Whitty, 1977). Whereas liberal and structural functionalist accounts of education assume that schools are democratic institutions that promote cultural excellence, value-free knowledge, and objective modes of instruction, the new sociology of education instead of separating knowledge from power must recognize that “what counts as knowledge in any school or society presupposes specific power relations” (Giroux, 1983:75).

In his criticism of reproduction theory, Giroux asserts that the theory of reproduction fails to develop a theory of schooling that dialectically links structure and human agency. He argues that the “one sided notions of power and human agency...need to be reconstructed” (Giroux, 1983:76). Instead, he acknowledges a dialectical struggle between reproductive structure and human agency to *resist* this structure (Giroux, 1983:83). Human beings are not merely passive subjects of hegemonic ideologies and processes but have agency to *resist* them (Giroux, 1983:83). “Resistance is a valuable theoretical and ideological construct that provides an important focus for analyzing the relationship between school and the wider society...It provides new theoretical leverage for understanding the complex ways in which subordinate groups experience educational failure and directs attention to new ways of thinking about and restructuring modes of critical pedagogy” (Giroux, 1983:107). For Giroux, resistance should be grounded in a framework that sees schools as social sites, particularizing the experience of

subordinate groups. It should reject “traditional explanations of school failure and oppositional behavior used by functionalists and instead shift to political analysis. Resistance redefines the causes and meaning of oppositional behavior arguing it has little to do with deviance, individual pathology, or learned hopelessness, but more with the logic of moral and political indignation” (Giroux, 1983:108).

As he expands on theories of resistance, Giroux analyzes the way class and culture combine. He critiques Bowles, Gintis, and Althusser arguing that they emphasize social reproduction at the expense of cultural reproduction. In addition to economic reproduction, schools also transmit, produce, and legitimate culture. Therefore, a more viable approach to understanding the role schools play in social reproduction should focus on the role of cultural reproduction. This analysis allows for the development of a cultural politics where schools develop oppositional cultures thereby galvanizing a viable political force. Theories of resistance allow for political analysis of the practices making up the class based cultural field (Giroux, 1983:101). Resistance theories help identify “relative autonomy” – different from Marxist determinism; allowing agency to human actors.

Resistance then carries the hope of transcendence and radical transformation. It embodies a perspective that centers emancipation as its guiding priority. “Elements of resistance now become the focal point...in which students can find a voice and maintain and extend the positive dimensions of their own cultures and histories (Giroux, 1983:111). Giroux’s ideas point in the direction of liberation for marginalized groups from the culturally repressive and reproductive constraints of schools within American society, providing the grounding for a truly radical pedagogy and starting point for educational transformation.

## ***Transformation***

Educational theorist, William Bigelow asserts that true egalitarian efforts in education should aim to critique the inequalities that are deeply embedded within school and classroom experiences. He suggests that the classroom should be a dialogical space where children are taught to critique their society (Bigelow, 1990:437). Children differentially experience social inequality and therefore their lived experiences should be extrapolated and included in classroom learning. Bigelow contends that the hidden curriculum should be interrogated to identify how it maintains realities of dominance and subordination and how it defines what is and what is not knowledge. Knowledge is not neutral but is determined and legitimated through political agencies. Teachers are not neutral in this process but are political agents and should recognize and embrace their role as agents of transformation and social justice.

Similarly, Michael Apple examines the possibilities of educational transformation. He explains how conservative influence in modern education reform have focused on neo-liberal strategies of marketization and privatization. These efforts have focused on increasing national standards, testing, and curricula. He asserts that “such policies may actually reproduce or even worsen class, gender and race inequalities” (Apple, 2008:240). Understanding education means situating it within the larger inequalities and power relations within society. Schools should be truly democratic in their allowing oppressed groups to challenge hegemonic structures and ideologies embedded within the curriculum and society at large. Critical democratic schools shouldn’t reproduce dominance, but challenge it (Apple, 2008:252).

Apple argues that there are seven tasks of every critical scholar. The critical scholar should “1) illuminate how educational policy and practice are related to processes of exploitation and domination in larger society. 2) Should identify places where counter hegemonic struggles are occurring. 3) Should challenge existing unequal power relations. 4) Should critique dominant ideologies and produce counter hegemonic knowledge. 5) Should be engaged in the tradition of radical work. 6) Should engage with different audiences. 7) Should act in collaboration with social movements (Apple, 2008:257). Apple thus believes that critical education serves the purpose of exposing unequal power relations in society and challenging through criticism and creating counterhegemonic knowledge (Apple, 2008).

Applying the critical lens to education in the African American context, Michael Dantley explains the need for successful urban educational leaders to lead with “*critical spirituality*”. He defines critical spirituality as critical self-reflection, deconstructive interpretation, performative creativity, and transformative action. He contends “that educational leaders who use purpose-driven leadership as the foundation of their professional practice clearly understand the multidimensional aspects of their daily challenges and yet find the inner strength to resist both the systemic inequities in the educational system and the hegemonic structures and forms of oppression running rampantly in society”(Dantley, 2010:215). He further observes that African American spirituality is animated by the concepts of liberation and the overcoming of adversity and oppression. This spirituality is not merely religious, but cultural and political. It embodies a resistance to hegemonic concepts of Black inferiority in preference of affirmative Afro self-conceptions. Dantley contends that critically spiritual school leaders support Black academic achievement in urban centers by investing their students with cultural knowledge, political

consciousness, and spiritual reliance as a means of preparing them for success within school and beyond (Dantley, 2010:218).

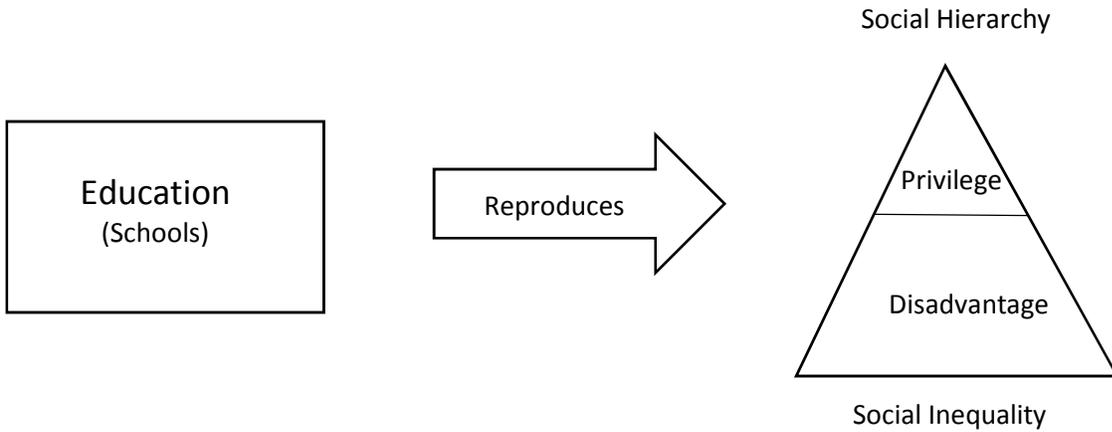
Critical pedagogy theory then provides the appropriate theoretical and conceptual framework for this research in several ways. First, it creates a theoretical platform to critique dominant educational frameworks that omit the histories and cultures of non-white peoples and countenance racially unequal educational outcomes as normative. Secondly, critical pedagogy theory engages a structural analysis of society and education seeing the roots of racial achievement disparities as developing within the larger political economy of the inequitable market social system. Thirdly, critical pedagogy theory recognizes and affirms the agency of oppressed groups to counter hegemonic systems that normalize their educational failure. Fourthly, it articulates a framework for political resistance by teaching cultural knowledge within schools, affirming and nurturing ethnic identities, strengthening achievement, and helping students locate and critique their position in society. Fifthly, critical pedagogy theory enables a race, class, and gender liberatory analysis that serves to advance the freedom of oppressed groups from educational marginalization and oppression. Finally, Dantley's concept of "*critical spirituality*" deploys a faith-based ethic in the service of the academic, social, and cultural advancement and liberation of students of color within the school environment.

Figure 1 provides a visual theoretical model for understanding the application of liberatory pedagogies. Liberatory pedagogies within schools disrupt normative educational processes that reproduce social inequality. Through resistance, they empower marginalized groups in the direction of social equality and transformation. Applying a critical pedagogy

theoretical lens to the research questions of this study, figure 2 visually depicts a conceptual model of a Black operated Seventh-day Adventist school and its' influence on the achievement and development of Black students.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Models

### Normative Educational Frame



### Liberatory Educational Frame

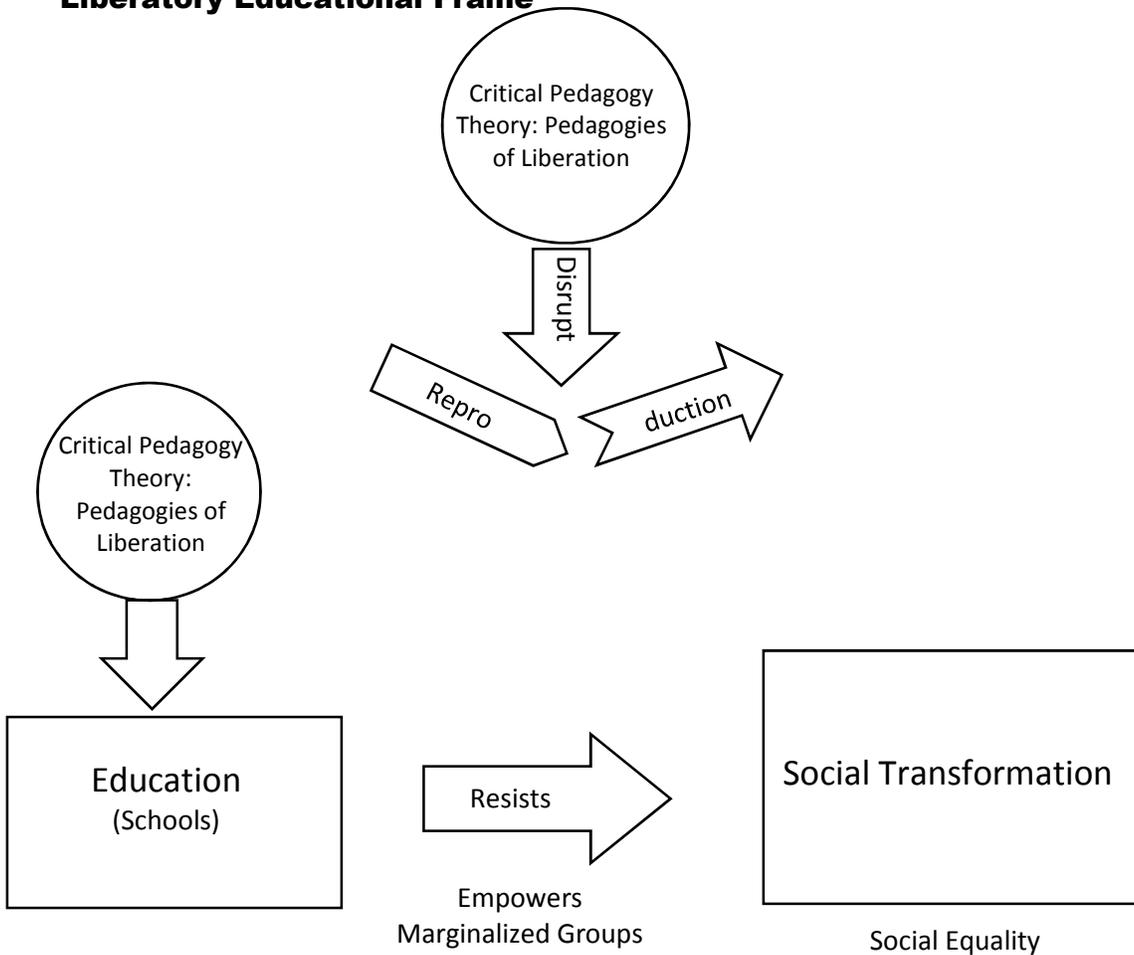


Figure 1: Theoretical Model for Critical Pedagogy Theory

## Liberatory Educational Frame: Pedagogies of Liberation

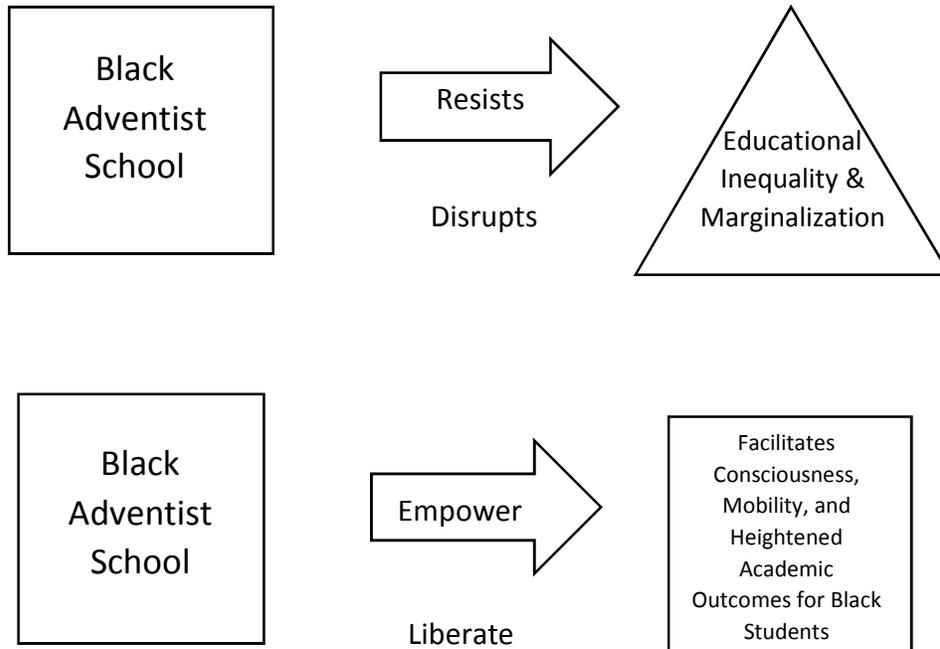


Figure 2: Conceptual Model for Research

### Theoretical Definitions:

This study employs the critical pedagogy concepts of *liberation* and *resistance* to analyze the nature and quality of this Black Seventh-day Adventist school. These two core concepts are now theoretically defined in this section, and empirically constructed in chapter four Data and Methods.

**Liberation:** emancipation from oppression in its social, economic, political, cultural, and ideological forms especially as it relates to racism and white supremacy (Cone, 2003; Freire, 1970; Hopkins, 2004)

Liberation thus defined is both a social and political outcome realized through struggle. It embodies the reorganizing of power relations between dominant and subordinate groups elevating the latter from their imposed subordination. Liberation then, is a political concept, challenging the relationships of power within a society. Freire identified the links between pedagogy and liberation by observing that liberatory action is pedagogical action inasmuch as it is an approach to teaching and learning that involves analysis, critique, and reflection of a social situation in an effort to deconstruct the conditions of oppression (Freire, 1970). He states, “to surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (Freire, 1970:47). The goal of liberatarian education “is for the people to become masters of their (own) thinking” (Freire, 1970). Pedagogies of liberation empower, critique, deconstruct, and create new concepts and frameworks of knowledge for the oppressed. They release marginalized groups from narrow cultural and ideological frameworks handed down by dominant groups and empower the marginalized to envisage the world from their own perspective. Liberation is the pedagogy of the marginalized (Freire, 1970). Hopkins suggests that Black liberation represents “faith from the perspective of Black experience and in a way that demands the full liberation and recognized humanity of people of colour, the poor, the marginalized, and oppressed” (Hopkins, 2004). Such liberation is never given, but only achieved through the praxis of critical reflection, deconstruction, and struggle.

**Resistance:** the exertion of oppositional force against established ideology, knowledge, or power (Apple, 2008; Giroux, 1983)

Resistance is an action against a preceding force—a *reaction* to power. It is a reflection and expression of the agency of dominated groups in a society to remonstrate against their domination. Resistance is oppositional force in the service of liberation. Resistance and liberation are then connected in that one facilitates the other. As a political concept, resistance is the instrument of social struggle. Young and Whitty note that, “Power distributed in a society functions in the interests of specific ideologies and forms of knowledge to sustain the economic and political concerns of particular groups and classes” (Young and Whitty, 1977). Critical perspectives within sociology of education literature conceptualize resistance as a tool in the arsenal of marginalized groups and educators to challenge hegemonic ideologies and knowledge forms and their attendant political structures (Apple, 2008; Giroux, 1983). Giroux asserts that the pedagogical value of resistance is that it guides how schools and educators operationalize “concepts of culture and self-formation” to counter hegemonic ideologies and pedagogies that are harmful to minoritized populations (Giroux, 1983). He surmises, “Elements of resistance now become the focal point...in which students can find a voice and maintain and extend the positive dimensions of their own cultures and histories” (Giroux, 1983). Within the U.S., this resistance may be expressed against educational frameworks that center White cultural perspectives and knowledge to the exclusion of other cultural reference points (McLaren, 2005). Resistance may be seen in the strategies that schools, educators, and parents from marginalized communities employ to steel their children against the social and educational harms and exclusions of the dominant culture.

These two key concepts of liberation and resistance are used to interpret the data from this research study and help inform the nature and quality of this Black Seventh-day Adventist school. These concepts are empirically constructed in chapter four in a manner that allowed the researcher to determine their presence or absence within this school. That is, does this school contain elements of liberation and resistance as defined in the literature and if so, how are these elements influencing Black student learning and development?

In conclusion, critical pedagogy theory is a sociological framework that is useful for analyzing the complex intersections of race, class, and education. It views traditional education in market societies as a political project that reproduces White class dominance and hegemony. It avers that critical educators infuse their students with political knowledge empowering them to resist ideologies of dominance and advance their own liberation. Critical pedagogy theory asserts an emancipatory posture against hegemonic frameworks of Eurocentrism and White supremacy. Having reviewed the key theoretical concepts of critical pedagogy theory and their use in this study, the next chapter will outline the methodological approach detailing the sources and procedures for data collection and analysis.

## Chapter Four: Data and Methods

### Research Design

The history of social science research in education began with the scientific empirical sociology of the 1960s with its focus on positivist quantitative methodology that used large scale data sets to analyze schools and achievement (Sadovnik, 2007). A shift was seen in the 1990s as postmodern qualitative methodological approaches began to focus on microanalysis, subjectivity, and interpretive methods in educational research (Sadovnik, 2007). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many sociologists now advocate for a mixed methods approach employing both quantitative and qualitative methods as an important part of sociology of education research (Chatterji, 2005; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Maxwell, 2004; Sadovnik, 2007).

However, to develop an in-depth understanding of a phenomena, group, system, or social unit, such as a program or institution, social scientist Robert Yin advocates the case study tradition which is characterized by qualitative research approaches (Yin, 2014). Qualitative research is defined as a non-numerical “inquiry process of understanding” wherein the researcher “builds a complex, holistic picture” of a social or human problem through interviews, word analysis, observations, and other methods in an effort to understand meaning and patterns of relationships (Babbie, 2016; Creswell, 2018). The case study method is a qualitative research approach involving the exploration of a single real-life case “through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2018). The case study method is an appropriate methodological approach for this study as it facilitates an in-depth

understanding of a defined case, that is a Black Seventh-day Adventist school, through the exploration of multiple data sources.

Therefore, this research employed a qualitative instrumental case study design using multiple data sources to gain a rich understanding of a Black operated Seventh-day Adventist school and its influence on Black student learning and development. The instrumental case study design is appropriate for this study as it utilizes multiple data sources to facilitate an understanding of and provide insight into a particular case that may illustrate a broader issue or problematic (Creswell, 2018; Stake, 1995). The design for this study incorporated multiple data sources including: 1) eight key informant interviews, 2) one focus group interview, 3) school achievement data, and 4) review of curricular materials, school documents, video from a school assembly, and the school website. Through interviews, focus groups, and review of achievement data and curricular documents, the researcher gained an understanding of achievement at this school and identified factors which provide rich detail and description of the nature and quality of education within this Black faith-based school. Analysis of this data yields valuable themes detailing processes, attitudes, organizational culture, and approaches that influence Black student achievement and development. The researcher examined school achievement data as a measure of Black academic achievement in this school. These results were compared with the assessments' national achievement norms. Finally, review of curricular manuals, school documents, school assembly video, and the school website provide further understanding of what is being taught in the classroom, school mission, and other organizational features.

Using these four data sources, the research design is intended to facilitate multi-layered perspectives of the school to understand how it supports the academic achievement and development of its students. Through an analysis of these four data sources, the researcher intends to answer the four research questions of this study: (RQ1) What are the factors that influence the academic, social, and cultural development of Black students attending a Black Seventh-day Adventist school? (RQ2) To what extent, if any, do these academic, social, and cultural factors facilitate the liberation of Black students? (RQ3) To what extent, if any, are elements of resistance occurring within this school? (RQ4) How does the faith-based philosophy of this school contribute to the academic development and success of Black students? Inasmuch as the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to explore phenomena to provide rich detail and description, findings of this inquiry may be transferrable, but not generalizable (Creswell, 2018).

### **Data Sources**

**Participants** - Within the U.S., there are 838 Seventh-day Adventist elementary and secondary schools serving over 50,000 students in grades pre-k -12<sup>th</sup>. From 2006-2009, the Seventh-day Adventist church commissioned a longitudinal study, the *CognitiveGenesis* project, that revealed that students within Adventist schools were outperforming their peers nationally in both public and private schools (Thayer & Kido, 2012). Although the *CognitiveGenesis* project yielded valuable insights on student achievement within the Adventist educational system, research specific to the performance of Black students within Black operated Seventh-day

Adventist school systems is deficient. By Black operated school systems, this study refers to regional school districts within the Seventh-day Adventist organization that are overseen by Black administrators and educators serving a predominantly Black constituency. There are nine such regional districts or “conferences” in the American Seventh-day Adventist Church spanning over 40 states and primarily covering the urban centers of the nation. Each school within these Black operated conferences is organized and supported by Black Seventh-day Adventist churches (Rock, 2018).

The Black Seventh-day Adventist school that is the subject of this case study is located in a smaller urban community with a population of approximately 18,200 and a Black residency rate of 29.5%. This community, however, lies within a larger metropolitan area of over six million residents. The student racial demographic in the school is over 95% black. The school principal and 83% of school educators are Black. In addition, the school is located in an urban center comprised predominantly by Black and Brown residents. The social class distribution of the student population spans from lower to upper middle-class households. This school is organized and operated by a consortium of local Black Seventh-day Adventist churches. The sample frame includes 447 students matriculating through grades prek-8 from 2014-2021.

The first data source for this research was gleaned from key informant interviews. Eight key informant participants were selected through purposive sampling. These informants include the conference superintendent of schools (who administrates over all conference Adventist schools across five states), the school principal, the chair of the school board, three teachers (one from each of the three grade cohorts preK-2, 3-5, 6-8), and two historical informants.

To gain the perspectives of parent stakeholders, the second data source gathered a parent focus group consisting of three participants (three parents). Parents were selected through convenience sampling.

Key informants and focus group participants were selected at the broader conference organizational level, local school administrative level, classroom level, and parent levels to uncover multi-layered insights and perspectives on educational processes, in-school characteristics, organizational features, parent factors, and achievement outcomes existent within this school. Participants were selected to provide key perspectives that facilitate understanding on the nature, quality, and impact of the school.

The third data source for this study was gathered from school achievement data. This study reviewed six years of longitudinal data from two school assessments covering student achievement between 2014-2021. Additionally, the researcher reviewed four years of eighth grade GPA data between 2014-2021 to provide a measure of student achievement at the end of their final year in the school. Finally, achievement data from a cohort of students continuously enrolled in the school from the third through eighth grades was also reviewed to assess the impact of longevity on student achievement. All achievement data was collected and reviewed based on available data from the school principal and superintendent's office.

And finally, the fourth data source comes from denominational curriculum guides, teacher resources, video from a school assembly, and the school website to glean insights into curricular content, approaches, philosophy, and other fundamental features undergirding the learning environment.

## Data Collection

### *Procedures and Measures –*

#### *\*Key Informant Interviews:*

Following IRB approval and institutional approvals from the conference superintendent's office and local school, the researcher conducted structured interviews with eight key informants (superintendent, school principals, chair of the school board, three teachers, and two historical informants). All interviews were individually conducted online via the Zoom virtual platform and were between 45-75 minutes in length each. Interviews were audially recorded by the zoom recording feature, a secondary audio device, and complimented by researcher recorded notes. All participants signed a consent form prior to sitting for the interview. Recorded interviews were transcribed through Temi transcription services ([www.temi.com](http://www.temi.com)). Transcriptions were submitted to participants to ensure accuracy. To help answer **RQs1-4**, interview data from the eight interviews were analyzed using the data analysis spiral to code data from each interview transcript, extract relevant factors, and then organize the data into themes (Creswell, 2018:185).

The instrument employed to collect interview data was an eight-question interview protocol (see appendix A). Two questions in the protocol were constructed to help answer RQ1, two questions were constructed around RQ2, three questions were focused around RQ3, and two questions were constructed to help answer RQ4. Interview questions for the protocol were constructed by the researcher and submitted to a qualitative educational research professional for review to eliminate bias in any of the questions, as well as ensure the questions

facilitated understanding of the research questions. Questions were open-ended in an effort to uncover relevant academic, social, and cultural factors as determined by the respondent.

*\*Focus group interview:*

The second means of data collection occurred through a 60-minute focus group interview of parents (as selected and described in the previous section). Parent participants signed a consent form providing permission for interview prior to conducting the interview. The focus group interview occurred through the zoom video conferencing platform. Participants were given passwords to ensure only selected participants were in the zoom conference. Participants were also instructed to identify a quiet and private setting from which to join the zoom conference. The researcher instructed participants on the confidentiality of the interview as well as norms for the group interview prior to beginning the session. Once the focus group session began, researcher moved through an eight-question semi-structured interview protocol, ensuring the participation of all respondents. The researcher/facilitator utilized questions from the protocol to generate discussion and elicit participant responses that provided insight to the nature and quality of the academic, social, and cultural experience within the school. The researcher took brief written notes during the focus group session as well as reflective notes immediately following the session (Babbie, 2016:315). Upon conclusion of the focus group session, the researcher transcribed the session through Temi transcription services ([www.temi.com](http://www.temi.com)). The researcher also provided transcripts of the session to parent participants to ensure accuracy. Finally, the researcher employed the data analysis spiral to organize the transcript data into codes, extract relevant factors, and then organize the data into themes (Creswell, 2018:185).

The instrument employed to collect focus group interview data was an eight-question semi-structured interview protocol (see appendix B). Similarly, three questions were designed to help answer RQ1, three questions focus around RQ2, two questions were intended to facilitate understanding RQ3, and two questions helped answer RQ4. Focus group interview questions went through the same review process as previously described for the key informant interview protocol.

*\*School Achievement data: Iowa and Star Assessments, Eighth grade GPA data, Cohort data*

#### *Iowa Assessments*

The *Iowa Assessments* are a standardized testing instrument used to measure student achievement in all American Seventh-day Adventist schools. This test is biannually administered by every school in both the fall and spring academic semesters as a means of testing student academic knowledge in specific content areas and measuring growth throughout the course of the academic year. These assessments are administered in Adventist schools beginning in the third grade. Results by student, grade level, and school are managed by Riverside Insights testing agency and accessible both to local school administrators and the conference superintendent's office.

Following IRB approval and institutional approval from the conference superintendent's office, the researcher met with the superintendent to review three years of school *Iowa Assessments* results between 2014-2021. Hence, an examination of this batch of secondary data from the 2014-2021 *Iowa Assessments* was used as another data source to triangulate

with the three other sources of data in this study. Such triangulation provides a robust understanding of this school and its influence on Black student achievement and development.

Developed by the research program in educational measurement at the University of Iowa, for the past 85 years the *Iowa Assessments* are used in thousands of public and private schools in cities and states across the nation (Dunbar and Welch, 2015:3). A key feature of this assessment useful for this study is that it allows comparison of student performance across local, state, and national groups (Dunbar and Welch, 2015:4). By creating a national comparative sample, the *Iowa Assessments* “enable norm-referenced interpretations of student performance” (Dunbar and Welch, 2015:11). The national comparative sample was created through a probability sample representative of students nationwide across public and private schools, geographical regions, and racial groups (Dunbar and Welch, 2015:12). Groups were weighted to ensure they closely approximated the national representation. For example, racial representation in the national comparative sample approximates national figures with the percentage of black students in the weighted sample being 14.2% compared to the percentage of black students in the national population being 14.1% (Dunbar and Welch, 2015:19). Achievement scores for this national comparative sample are ranked according to percentiles. The 50<sup>th</sup> percentile thus represents the median rank for students within the national comparative sample and represents the national norm. A score expressed as at, above, or below, the national norm refers to whether the score is at, above, or below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. For this study, school achievement data is compared with this national comparative sample or norm group.

### Star Assessments

The Star Reading and Math assessments are brief 20-25 minute tests that provide teachers quick estimates of student achievement levels (Renaissance Learning, Inc. 2020). Although not as comprehensive as the Iowa Assessments, the Star assessments are used in the school by teachers to provide quick measures of student achievement and growth throughout the year. The assessments are administered to students in grades 1-8. The Star Reading and Math assessments establish a nationally norm-based benchmark at the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile to denote students scoring at/above or below that level (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2020). Three years of school Star Assessment data were collected, reviewed, and findings reported in chapter five.

### Eighth Grade GPA data and Cohort data

Four years of student GPA data were also reviewed to understand the achievement of students in their final year at Franklin school. GPA data was gathered from a total of 49 Franklin eighth graders over four consecutive years. Also, to get an ending measure of achievement from students who matriculated through Franklin, eighth grade Iowa test scores were reviewed for a cohort of students continuously enrolled in Franklin from at least grades three through eight. GPA data and cohort data were reviewed, and findings reported in chapter five.

*\*Review of Curricular materials, school documents, and school website*

The North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (NAD) Curriculum Committee is the organizational body that reviews, creates, and adopts curricula for all Seventh-day Adventist elementary and secondary schools within North America. This body is responsible for the creation of curriculum manuals (or guides) and curriculum standards in all academic subject areas (i.e., math, language arts, science, bible, PE/Health, social studies, fine arts, and technology) for grades K-12<sup>6</sup>. These curriculum guides and standards are used by teachers in Adventist schools to guide their instruction. The researcher met with the school principal to review curriculum manuals and curriculum standards across content areas and grade levels in the school. In addition, the researcher surveyed additional resource documents as provided by the principal and teachers which provided an in-depth understanding of the content and nature of curricular and instructional approaches within the school. The researcher also reviewed video from a recent school assembly that depicted students' views on social justice issues. This video was provided by teachers. Finally, the researcher reviewed the school website to facilitate an understanding of the organizational features, quality, and offerings of the school. Findings from these reviews are revealed and discussed in the subsequent chapters.

### **Data Analysis**

The four data sources (key informant interviews, focus group interview, test score data, and review of curricular documents) were analyzed or reviewed in the following manner. Interview data from key informants and focus group was analyzed using the data analysis spiral to code

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<sup>6</sup> <https://curriculum.adventisteducation.org/about.html> retrieved on Oct 7, 2020

data from each interview transcript (Creswell, 2018:185). Relevant factors as determined by the respondent were identified, memoed, and then organized into emergent themes (Creswell, 2018:185). These emergent themes provide detail that enables rich description of this Black Seventh-day Adventist school and its influence on Black students. Such detail facilitates answers to the research questions. Findings from this analysis are revealed and discussed in the subsequent chapters.

As mentioned in chapter three, the core theoretical concepts of this study are the concepts of liberation and resistance. The presence (or absence) of these two concepts were explored in the four data sources. To do this, these concepts were empirically constructed. The following are the empirical constructs for liberation and resistance:

**Liberation- Empirical Construct:** The presence (or absence) of liberatory elements within the school was explored through the four data sources. Within the qualitative interviews, test score data, and curricular documents, this study defines the presence of liberation as being indicated through several words, phrases, concepts, or outcomes that may be expressed by respondents or revealed in the data. (see Fig 3). *Empowering:* providing physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual power through learning that promotes student's social, political, economic, and cultural advancement (Apple, 2008; Aronson and Laughter, 2016; Freire, 1970). *Succeeding (Success):* facilitating learning that allows student to effectively compete and advance educationally (Barrett, 2009, 2010; Thayer and Kido, 2012). *Strengthening:* supporting the academic, emotional, mental, spiritual, and cultural development of the student (Dantley, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). *Affirming:* promotes healthy attitudes, confidence, and positive self-concept to facilitate self-actualization (McCray, Grant, and Beachum, 2010). *Building*

*Consciousness*: capacity of student to both understand and effectively engage their world toward positive personal and collective social outcomes (Apple, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006). *Critical Thinking, Deconstructive analysis, and Creativity*: students are developing into independent and analytical thinkers and encouraged to think and express themselves creatively (Dantley, 2010; Freire, 1970). These concepts overlap but are intended to identify multiple words, phrases, concepts, or outcomes that may be expressed by respondents which denote elements of liberation as defined in this study and identified in the literature.

As an empirical construct, this study organizes the concept of liberation into nine categories or domains that reflect observable areas in the development of the student. Student development in these categories may be facilitated by the pedagogical approaches, efforts, intentions, and expectations of teachers, administrators, and parents. These nine categories or domains of liberation are (see Fig 4): 1) confidence and self-actualization, 2) positive self-concept, 3) cultural awareness, 4) resilience, 5) academic ability, 6) critical thinking, 7) socio-political consciousness, 8) spiritual consciousness, and 9) leadership development. These categories are developed from the literature and organized as domains of liberation (Apple, 2008; Aronson and Laughter, 2016; Barrett, 2009, 2010; Dantley, 2010; Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1994 1995, 2006; McCray, Grant, and Beachum, 2010; Thayer and Kido, 2012). The four data sources were explored to identify the presence or absence of liberation within these domains.

Theoretical Concept	Empirical Construct
<b>Liberation</b>	<i>Empowering</i> : providing physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual power through learning that promotes student’s social, political, economic, and cultural advancement
	<i>Succeeding (Success)</i> : facilitating learning that allows student to effectively compete and advance educationally
	<i>Strengthening</i> : supporting the academic, emotional, mental, spiritual, and cultural development of the student
	<i>Affirming</i> : promotes healthy attitudes, confidence, and positive self-concept to facilitate self-actualization
	<i>Building Consciousness</i> : capacity of student to both understand and effectively engage their world toward positive personal and collective social outcomes
	<i>Critical Thinking, Deconstructive analysis, and Creativity</i> : students are developing into independent and analytical thinkers and encouraged to think and express themselves creatively

**Figure 3:** Empirical Construct for Liberation

Domains of Liberation	Empirical Domains of Student development
<b>Liberation</b>	Confidence & Self-Actualization
	Positive Self-Concept
	Cultural Awareness
	Resilience
	Academic Ability
	Critical Thinking
	Socio-political consciousness
	Spiritual consciousness
	Leadership Development

**Figure 4:** Empirical Domains of Liberation

**Resistance- Empirical Construct:** The presence (or absence) of elements of resistance within the school was explored through the four data sources. Resistance is an action carried out by actors. Within educational contexts, these actors are teachers, administrators, parents, and students. This study defines resistance as actions expressed by these actors in the following ways (see Fig 5): 1) challenging hegemonic frameworks, ideologies, and pedagogies of racial exclusion (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 2005), 2) embracing social consciousness and critique (Dantley, 2010; Freire, 1970), 3) establishing affirming learning environments as a counter to racially hostile educational contexts (Keels, Durkee, and Hope, 2017), 4) ensuring cultural relevance and inclusion in education vs. cultural homogeneity and exclusion (Akua, 2019; Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006; Lomotey, 1992; Shockley, 2008, 2015), 5) investing time and resources into Black students to counter social trends of disinvestment (Hayes, 2012; Hill, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013; Noguera, 2008), 6) resisting educational mediocrity or failure through high expectations and standards of excellence (Love and Kruger 2005; Peterson, 2016; van Den Bergh, 2010; Williams, 2011).

This study identifies 12 observable categories as informed by the literature wherein the above actions of resistance may be expressed. These 12 categories or domains of resistance are (see Fig 6): **Administrators- 1) Behavior management approach** (Lustick, 2017; Quimby, 2021; Schiff, 2018), **2) Staff Composition** (Moore, 2017; Oates, 2003), **3) Teacher quality** (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Koedel, 2008; Okpala, Rotich-Tanui, and Ardley, 2009), **4) Parent Partnerships** (Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016), **5) Engagement with students** (Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016), **6) Organizational culture** (Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016); **Teachers- 7) Pedagogy and Practice** (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994), **8) Teacher attitudes & engagement**

(Love and Kruger, 2005; van Den Bergh, 2010; Williams, 2011), **Parents- 9)** *Motivations for enrolling child at school* (Lee and Bowen, 2016), **10)** *Parent engagement/involvement and participation* (Hayes, 2017; Lee and Bowen, 2006); **Student- 11)** *Student motivation* (Aronson and Laughter, 2016; Barrett, 2010), **12)** *student attitude* (Aronson and Laughter, 2016; Barrett, 2010). The four data sources was explored to identify the presence (or absence) of resistance within these domains.

Theoretical Concept	Empirical Construct
<b>Resistance</b>	Challenging hegemonic frameworks, ideologies, and pedagogies of racial exclusion
	Embracing social consciousness and critique
	Establishing affirming learning environments as a counter to racially hostile educational contexts
	Ensuring cultural relevance and inclusion in education vs. cultural homogeny and exclusion
	Investing time and resources into Black students to counter social trends of disinvestment
	Resisting educational mediocrity or failure through high expectations and standards of excellence

**Figure 5:** Empirical Construct for Resistance

Domains of Resistance	Empirical Domains
<b>Resistance</b>	<b>Administrators-</b> 1) Behavior management approach 2) Staff Composition 3) Teacher quality 4) Parent Partnerships 5) Engagement with students 6) Organizational culture
	<b>Teachers-</b> 7) Pedagogy and Practice 8) Teacher attitudes & engagement
	<b>Parents-</b> 9) Motivations for enrolling child at school 10) Parent engagement/involvement and participation
	<b>Student-</b> 11) Student motivation 12) student attitude

**Figure 6:** Empirical Domains of Resistance

School achievement data including six years of longitudinal data from two assessments, three years of eighth grade GPA data, and cohort data all within the years 2014-2021 were reviewed and facilitate an understanding of student academic achievement within the school. Findings from this review of achievement data are presented in chapter five.

Finally, a review of the curricular materials, school documents, school assembly video, and website reveal specific curricular approaches, content, and school organizational features that enable a fuller understanding of the school’s learning environment. Findings from this review are presented in chapter five.

In summary, the four data sources of this study were reviewed or analyzed using qualitative methodological techniques such as the data analysis spiral, memoing, coding, comparative review, and categorization (Creswell, 2018:185-206). Findings from these analyses are reported in the next chapter. By exploring the four data sources, the researcher was able to uncover the nature and quality of this school. The researcher also employed a critical pedagogical lens to explore the presence or absence of liberation and resistance within this Black Seventh-day Adventist school. Findings from this exploration are presented and discussed in the following chapters.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher took several steps to mitigate possible bias and safeguard the dependability of this study. Transcripts from interviews with key informants and focus group participants were submitted to participants to ensure accuracy. This member checking ensured that participants' statements were accurately captured (Babbie, 2016). Additionally, the researcher conducted an audit trail by submitting interview data to an independent reviewer to study and determine whether they uncover similar themes independent of the researcher (Babbie, 2016). This additional step helps ensure the dependability of the research findings.

In conclusion, the methodological approach of this study adopted a qualitative case study design using multiple data sources to gain a rich understanding of the nature of this Black operated Adventist school and its' influence on Black students. Four data sources were used in

this study including: 1) eight key informant interviews, 2) a parent focus group, 3) school achievement data, and 4) a review of curricular materials, school documents, school assembly video, and the school website. The use of multiple data sources provides a multi-layered perspective for understanding the school and its impact on students to answer the research questions of what academic, social, and cultural factors are influential for student achievement and development within this Black Adventist school. In the next chapters, we will review researcher findings, discussion, conclusions, and implications for policy and practice.

## **Chapter Five: Findings**

### **Background and Setting**

This qualitative study explored a Black operated Seventh-day Adventist elementary school in an urban metropolitan area to understand the nature and quality of this school and its influence on Black student learning and development. The school has been given the pseudonym “Franklin SDA school”. The sample included 447 students matriculating through grades preK-8 from 2014-2021. The student racial demographic is over 95% Black, and the school is comprised of a racially diverse educational and administrative staff. The study explored four data sources including: 1) eight key informant interviews, 2) a focus group interview, 3) school achievement data, and 4) curriculum standards, school documents, and school website. Key informant and focus group participants including parents, teachers, administrators, and historical informants were selected via purposive sampling to provide perspectives that facilitated understanding of the nature, quality, and impact of this school. Participants were eager to share their experiences, and several expressed what they perceived as a need to elevate Black faith-based educational spaces in academic research.

Finally, this study explored four research questions: RQ1- What are the factors that influence the academic, social, and cultural development of Black students attending a Black Seventh-day Adventist school? RQ2- To what extent, if any, do these academic, social, and cultural factors facilitate the liberation of Black students? RQ3- To what extent, if any, are elements of resistance occurring within this school? RQ4- How does the faith-based philosophy of this school contribute to the academic development and success of Black students? The

findings in this chapter provide rich and detailed answers to these research questions and are herein presented.

### *Participants*

#### Key Informant and Focus Group Interviews

Eleven total participants were interviewed, three as members of a parent focus group and eight participating in individual interviews. The following is a description of each of the 11 participants, all of whom were given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity:

**KI-1: “Janet”**- Janet is a retired educator who was amongst the early group of parents that helped to found and organize the school. Her children and grandchildren have attended the school. She has served on the school’s board in the early years and was a Franklin educational leader in her church. Because of these roles, she is a key historical informant.

**KI-2: “Christine”**- Christine is a parent of a former student (now adult) that attended the school. Over the decades, she has served in many volunteer roles in the school including being a member of the school board and was also a Franklin educational leader in her church. Her longstanding experience with the school positions her as a key historical informant.

**KI-3: “Vanessa”**- Vanessa is a teacher within the school and has served in that role for over a decade. Vanessa is passionate about teaching and genuinely interested in the success of her students. She provides the perspective of a skilled educator who has taught many students in public and private schools over two decades.

**KI-4: “Marcus”**- Marcus is a parent with children in the school and also serves on the school board as its chair. He brings the lens of a parent and organizational administrator. He is also a

graduate of the school. These multiple roles make Marcus a key informant with layered experiences within the school.

**KI-5: “Alvin”**- Alvin is the Superintendent of schools overseeing the subject school and all the Black SDA schools within its regional system. He brings the perspective of a senior educational administrator as well as former Franklin school principal. Alvin’s children also attended Franklin school.

**KI-6: “Miriam”**- Miriam is a former principal of Franklin school and former Superintendent. She has five decades of educational leadership experience in public and private contexts and is a seminal figure in the founding of the school. She brings both administrative and historical knowledge and expertise.

**KI-7: “Natalie”**- Natalie is both vice principal and a teacher within Franklin school and has over two decades of experience as an educator. She believes in stretching her students to their maximum capability. She is a leader within the school and dedicates a substantial amount of time and resource supporting her students and their families.

**KI-8: “Maria”**- Maria is a former teacher in Franklin school and a career educator. She taught in the school for over a decade and believes in academic rigor. She prides herself in challenging students to their height.

**FG-1: “Paulette”**- Paulette is a parent with children in the school. She volunteers for the school when she is able. She is also an educator and is passionate about her children being in the proper environment for their development.

**FG-2:** “Lisa”- Lisa is a parent with children in the school and is highly involved in the school and engaged with her children’s teachers. She believes such engagement is critical to support positive outcomes for her children.

**FG-3:** “Michael”- Michael has several children that have matriculated through the school. As a father, he also serves on the school parent association, school board, and assists as a parent volunteer within the school. He is committed to helping the school in any way possible. He is also a graduate of the school.

Data from participants were transcribed, analyzed, coded, and organized into several emergent themes. Actual names and places have been given pseudonyms.

In this chapter, findings from school achievement data are first presented to understand Black student achievement at Franklin. Inasmuch as this study centers on the influence of a Black Seventh-day Adventist school on achievement, student achievement is first discussed in this chapter by looking at longitudinal test score and GPA data. Following this review of quantitative achievement data, six qualitative themes which emerged from interview data are discussed. These six themes answer each of the four research questions and provide detailed and thick description of the core factors within Franklin school influencing student achievement and development. The findings on Franklin’s student achievement are now presented.

## Achievement at Franklin School

Achievement data was reviewed from Franklin school to understand students' academic performance. In consultation with the superintendent's office and the school principal, school achievement data was reviewed from four sources: **A)** Iowa Assessment data (Tables 1-7), **B)** Star Assessment data (Tables 8-9), **C)** eighth grade GPA data (Table 10), and **D)** cohort test score data (Table 11). Six years of school longitudinal test score data from two standardized assessments (Iowa Assessments and Star Assessments) were reviewed. To maintain anonymity, the exact years of the assessment data were omitted. However, test data fall between the years 2015-2021. Iowa assessment data was reviewed for grades K-8. Star assessment data was reviewed for grades 1-8. Four years of eighth grade GPA data were also reviewed and provide a measure of students' achievement in their final year at Franklin (exact years are omitted to maintain anonymity but data falls between the years 2015-2021). Finally, eighth grade Iowa Assessment scores from a cohort of students that matriculated through the school from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade were also reviewed and provide insights on the ending achievement levels of students who completed six or more consecutive years at Franklin (exact years are omitted to maintain anonymity but data falls between the years 2011-2021). Longitudinal data, GPA data, and cohort data were gathered based on available data from the superintendent's office and Franklin school.

For context, Franklin school's longitudinal data is compared with national and state data from the U.S. Dept of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the largest nationally representative assessment of student achievement used by administrators,

teachers, educational researchers, and policy makers across the nation<sup>7</sup>. NAEP State data was gathered from the state where Franklin school is located (the state name is omitted to preserve the anonymity of school location). The findings from this NAEP data are represented in tables 12-15.

### **Iowa Assessment Data**

The three-year Iowa longitudinal data (Tables 1-7) present several findings regarding academic achievement at Franklin school. Iowa data provides several metrics to quantify student achievement: PR- national percentile rank, GE- grade equivalent, SS- standard score, ELA- English Language Arts score, and Math- Math score.

#### *National Percentile Rank (PR)*

As a nationally representative norm-referenced assessment, the Iowa Assessments enable local school scores to be compared with norm achievement scores across public and private schools nationwide (Dunbar and Welch, 2015). This allows comparisons to be made for individual student and school scores along a national percentile ranking (PR). A score of 50 on the PR (percentile rank) represents the national average. Scores above or below 50 PR are above or below the national average, respectively. Franklin's school data reveals that out of 447 students in grades K-8 over three years, 349 were in grades testing at or above the national norm or 78% (Table 4).

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<sup>7</sup> National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015-2019. Retrieved May 21, 2021  
<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/>

### Grade Equivalent (GE)

The Iowa Assessments also provide indicators that measure students' grade equivalent (GE). This allows parents and educators to assess how students are scoring relative to their grade level (Dunbar and Welch, 2015). The grade equivalent provides a measure of whether students are testing at grade level. Year one and year two Spring tests were administered in April and therefore reflect student scores after eight months of school learning (Aug-Mar). For years one and two, grade level would be a score of G.8, where G=current grade level and .8 represents eight months of learning. Scores above or below G.8 on the grade equivalence measure indicate students are above or below grade level, respectively. For example, a score of 3.6 on the GE measure indicates a student is testing at the third grade, six-month level. The year three Spring test was administered in May, and therefore reflects student scores after nine months of school learning (Aug-April). For year three, grade level would be a score of G.9 where G=current grade level and .9 represents nine months of learning. Scores above or below G.9 on the grade equivalence measure indicate students are above or below grade level, respectively. Franklin's school data reveals that out of 447 students in grades K-8 over three years, 333 were in grades testing at or above grade level or 74.4% (Table 5).

### Standard Score (SS)

The Iowa Assessment provides a standardized score that enables student performance to be classified under one of three categories: Advanced, Proficient, Not Proficient. These classifications are used by the US Department of Education to calculate progress for schools and districts nationwide (Dunbar and Welch, 2015). Appendix C details the table by which

standard scores represent proficiency across grades. Standard scores are only calculated from grades 3-8. Franklin's school data reveals that out of 252 students in grades 3-8 over three years, 252 or 100% were in grades that scored in the Proficient category for reading and 242 out of 252 or 96% were in grades that scored in the Proficient category for math (Table 6; Appendix C).

### *ELA and Math scores*

English Language abilities are measured through the Iowa Assessments' ELA score, which is a composite of reading, language, vocabulary, and writing scores (Dunbar and Welch, 2015). Mathematics and computation skills are measured by a math composite score (Dunbar and Welch, 2015). ELA and Math scores are constructed similarly to the grade equivalent measure. For example, a score of 3.6 would indicate that the student is testing at the third grade, six-month level. Franklin's school data reveals that out of 447 students in grades K-8 over three years, 434 or 97% were in grades testing at or above grade level in ELA (Table 7). Out of 447 students in grades K-8 over three years, 219 or 48.9% were in grades testing at or above grade level in Math (Table 7).

**Table 1: Franklin School Iowa Assessment Scores K-8 (Spring Year 1)\***

<b>Grade K</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>
#- 28	#- 17	#- 18	#- 14	#- 14
PR- 88	PR- 75	PR- 50	PR- 50	PR- 48
GE- 1.4	GE- 2.4	GE- 2.8	GE- 3.8	GE- 4.7
ELA- 1.5	ELA- 2.5	ELA- 2.8	ELA- 4.2	ELA- 5.2
Math- 1.4	Math- 2.1	Math- 3.0	Math- 3.5	Math- 4.3
			SS- 185.9 P	SS- 200.1 P
<b>Grade 5</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Grade 8</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>
#- 16	#- 10	#- 10	#- 18	# of students
PR- 40	PR- 50	PR- 44	PR- 51	PR- Nat'l Percentile Rank
GE- 5.4	GE- 6.9	GE- 7.3	GE- 9.0	GE- Grade Equivalent
ELA- 5.9	ELA- 8.2	ELA- 7.8	ELA- 10.8	ELA- English Language Arts
Math- 5.1	Math- 5.7	Math- 6.3	Math- 7.6	Math
SS- 207.5 P	SS- 228.6 P	SS- 234.0 P	SS- 252.4 P	SS- Standard Score P= Proficient

\*test administered in April

**Table 2:** Franklin School Iowa Assessment Scores K-8 (Spring Year 2)\*

<b>Grade K</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>
#- 20	#- 27	#- 21	#- 16	#- 15
PR- 94	PR- 69	PR- 92	PR- 45	PR- 55
GE- 1.6	GE- 2.2	GE- 4.1	GE- 3.6	GE- 5.1
ELA- 1.7	ELA- 2.2	ELA- 4.2	ELA- 3.9	ELA- 5.3
Math- 1.6	Math- 2.2	Math- 4.0	Math- 3.7	Math- 4.4
			SS- 183 P	SS- 204.8 P
<b>Grade 5</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Grade 8</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>
#- 12	#- 17	#- 10	#- 10	# of students
PR- 41	PR- 48	PR- 54	PR- 51	PR- Nat'l Percentile Rank
GE- 5.4	GE- 6.7	GE- 8.2	GE- 8.9	GE- Grade Equivalent
ELA- 5.8	ELA- 7.4	ELA- 9.0	ELA- 9.8	ELA- English Language Arts
Math- 4.7	Math- 6.1	Math- 7.3	Math- 8.7	Math
SS- 208.4 P	SS- 226.4 P	SS- 243.8 P	SS- 251.4 P	SS- Standard Score P= Proficient

\*test administered in April

**Table 3: Franklin School Iowa Assessment Scores K-8 (Spring Year 3)\***

<b>Grade K</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>
#- 17	#- 23	#- 24	#- 20	#- 13
PR- 82	PR- 75	PR- 84	PR- 57	PR- 41
GE- 1.3	GE- 2.4	GE- 3.7	GE- 4.0	GE- 4.4
ELA- 1.3	ELA- 2.4	ELA- 4.0	ELA- 4.6	ELA- 4.6
Math- 1.3	Math- 2.2	Math- 3.7	Math- 3.8	Math- 4.2
			SS- 189.7 P	SS- 195.2 P
<b>Grade 5</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Grade 8</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>
#- 16	#- 16	#- 17	#- 8	# of students
PR- 59	PR- 50	PR- 54	PR- 61	PR- Nat'l Percentile Rank
GE- 6.4	GE- 6.8	GE- 8.2	GE- 10.2	GE- Grade Equivalent
ELA- 6.7	ELA- 7.6	ELA- 9.1	ELA- 12.1	ELA- English Language Arts
Math- 5.9	Math- 6.3	Math- 7.7	Math- 9.0	Math
SS- 222.4 P	SS- 228.1 P	SS- 243.6 P	SS- 262.3 P	SS- Standard Score P= Proficient

\*test administered in May

**Table 4:** Iowa Assessment 50<sup>th</sup> Percentile National Percentile Ranking (PR)  
Franklin School Grades K-8 (Year One – Year Three)

Grade	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year One-Three
K	(28) PR-88	(20) PR- 94	(17) PR- 82	
1	(17) PR-75	(27) PR- 69	(23) PR- 75	
2	(18) PR-50	(21) PR- 92	(24) PR- 84	
3	(14) PR-50	(16) PR- 45 B	(20) PR-57	
4	(14) PR-48 B	(15) PR- 55	(13) PR- 41 B	
5	(16) PR-40 B	(12) PR- 41 B	(16) PR- 59	
6	(10) PR-50	(17) PR- 48 B	(16) PR- 50	
7	(10) PR- 44 B	(10) PR- 54	(17) PR- 54	
8	(18) PR-51	(10) PR- 51	(8) PR- 61	
Total students in grades at/above 50PR	105	103	141	349
Total students Tested	145	148	154	447
% of students in grades at/above 50PR	72.4	69.5	91.5	<b>78%</b>

( )= # of students in grade      PR= national percentile ranking      B=below 50PR

**Table 5: Iowa Assessment Grade Equivalent (GE)  
Franklin School Grades K-8 (Year One – Year Three)**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Year One</b>	<b>Year Two</b>	<b>Year Three</b>	<b>Year One-Three</b>
K	(28) 1.4	(20) 1.6	(17) 1.3	
1	(17) 2.4	(27) 2.2	(23) 2.4	
2	(18) 2.8	(21) 4.1	(24) 3.7	
3	(14) 3.8	(16) 3.6 B	(20) 4.0	
4	(14) 4.7 B	(15) 5.1	(13) 4.4 B	
5	(16) 5.4 B	(12) 5.4 B	(16) 6.4	
6	(10) 6.9	(17) 6.7 B	(16) 6.8 B	
7	(10) 7.3 B	(10) 8.2	(17) 8.2	
8	(18) 9.0	(10) 8.9	(8) 10.2	
Total students in grades at/above Grade level	105	103	125	333
Total students Tested	145	148	154	447
% of students in grades at/above Grade level	72.4	69.5	81.1	<b>74.4%</b>

( )= # of students in grade      B=below grade level

**Table 6: Iowa Assessment Proficiency Levels in Standard Scores (SS)  
Franklin School Grades 3-8 (Year One – Year Three)**

Grade	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year 1-3	Standard Score (SS) Reading & Math Proficiency Range <sup>8</sup>
3	(14) SSR- 186.9 P	(16) SSR- 180.9 P	(20) SSR- 197.9 P		R: 175-217
	SSM- 182.9 P	SSM- 181.9 P	SSM- 186 P		M: 177-204
4	(14) SSR- 203 P	(15) SSR- 200.9 P	(13) SSR- 194.6 P		R: 189-235
	SSM- 190.8 P	SSM- 192.7 P	SSM- 189.2 P		M: 189-223
5	(16) SSR- 211.3 P	(12) SSR- 210.8 P	(16) SSR- 224.9 P		R: 202-253
	SSSM- 202.8 P	SSM- 200.3 P	SSM- 211.4 P		M: 200-242
6	(10) SSR- 242.5 P	(17) SSR- 226.3 P	(16) SSR- 226.7 P		R: 213-264
	SSM- 216.8 P	SSM- 213.9 P	SSM- 218.4 P		M: 212-257
7	(10) SSR- 235.2 P	(10) SSR- 248.8 P	(17) SSR- 246.7 P		R: 226-287
	SSM- 218.7 NP	SSM- 228.5 P	SSM- 234.1 P		M: 222-276
8	(18) SSR- 265.6 P	(10) SSR- 256.8 P	(8) SSR- 276.5 P		R: 239-303
	SSM- 236.7 P	SSM- 243.6 P	SSM- 253.4 P		M: 236-290
Total students tested	82	80	90	252	
Total students in grades testing Proficient in Reading	82	80	90	252	
Total Students in grades testing Proficient in Math	72	80	90	242	
% of students in grades testing Proficient in Reading	100	100	100	<b>100%</b>	
% of students in grades testing Proficient in Math	87.8	100	100	<b>96%</b>	

( )= # of students in grade    **SSR**= Standard Score Reading    **SSM**= Standard Score Math    **P**=Proficient  
**NP**= Not Proficient                      **R**= Reading                      **M**= Math

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix C Iowa Assessments Interpreting Proficiency

**Table 7: Iowa Assessment ELA and Math Scores  
Franklin School Grades K-8 (Year One – Year Three)**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Year One</b>	<b>Year Two</b>	<b>Year Three</b>	<b>Year One-Three</b>
K	(28) E 1.5	(20) E 1.7	(17) E 1.3	
	M 1.4	M 1.6	M 1.3	
1	(17) E 2.5	(27) E 2.2	(23) E 2.4	
	M 2.1	M 2.2	M 2.2	
2	(18) E 2.8	(21) E 4.2	(24) E 4.0	
	M 3.0	M 4.0	M 3.7	
3	(14) E 4.2	(16) E 3.9	(20) E 4.6	
	M 3.5 B	M 3.7 B	M 3.8 B	
4	(14) E 5.2	(15) E 5.3	(13) E 4.6 B	
	M 4.3 B	M 4.4 B	M 4.2 B	
5	(16) E 5.9	(12) E 5.8	(16) E 6.7	
	M 5.1 B	M 4.7 B	M 5.9	
6	(10) E 8.2	(17) E 7.4	(16) E 7.6	
	M 5.7 B	M 6.1 B	M 6.3 B	
7	(10) E 7.8	(10) E 9.0	(17) E 9.1	
	M 6.3 B	M 7.3 B	M 7.7 B	
8	(18) E 10.8	(10) E 9.8	(8) E 12.1	
	M 7.6 B	M 8.7 B	M 9.0	
Total in grades at/above Grade level ELA	145	148	141	434
Total in grades at/above Grade level Math	63	68	88	219
Total students Tested	145	148	154	447
% in grades at/above Grade level ELA	100	100	91.5	<b>97%</b>
% in grades at/above Grade level Math	43.4	45.94	57.1	<b>48.9%</b>

( )= # of students in grade

**B**= Below grade level

**E**=ELA (English Language Arts)

**M**=Math

## Star Assessment data

The Star Reading and Math assessments are brief 20-25 minute tests that provide teachers quick estimates of student achievement levels (Renaissance Learning, Inc. 2020). Although not as comprehensive as the Iowa Assessments, the Star assessments are used in Franklin school by teachers to provide quick measures of student achievement and growth throughout the year. The assessments are administered to students in grades 1-8.

**Table 8:** Star Reading Assessment Franklin Grades 1-8 40<sup>th</sup> Percentile Benchmark totals

Grade Level	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year 1-3
1	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	14t-(14)-100%	
2	<i>n/a</i>	6t-(6)-100%	8t-(6)-75%	
3	10t-(10)-100%	10t-(8)-80%	10t-(7)-70%	
4	12t-(9)-75%	13t-(10)-77%	15t-(12)-80%	
5	16t-(9)-56%	17t-(13)-76%	19t-(8)-42%	
6	10t-(5)-50%	11t-(7)-64%	11t-(9)-82%	
7	8t-(6)-75%	10t-(6)-60%	11t-(6)-55%	
8	6t-(4)-67%	8t-(5)-63%	10t-(6)-60%	
Total Students tested	62	75	98	235
# at/above benchmark	43	55	68	166
% at/above benchmark	69.3	73.3	69.3	<b>70.6%</b>

**n/a**= not available

**t**= total students tested

**( )**= students at/above benchmark

The Star Reading and Math assessments establish a nationally norm-based benchmark at the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile to denote students scoring at/above or below that level (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2020). Franklin’s three-year Star Reading longitudinal data reveals that out of 235 tested students, 166 or 70.6% scored at/above the benchmark in reading (Table 8). Franklin’s three-year Star Math longitudinal data reveals that out of 235 tested students, 154 or 65.5% scored at/above the benchmark in math (Table 9).

**Table 9:** Star Math Assessment Franklin Grades 1-8 40<sup>th</sup> Percentile Benchmark totals

Grade Level	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year 1-3
1	n/a	n/a	14t-(14)-100%	
2	n/a	6t-(6)-100%	8t-(7)-88%	
3	10t-(9)-90%	10t-(8)-80%	10t-(8)-80%	
4	12t-(10)-83%	13t-(8)-62%	15t-(7)-47%	
5	16t-(9)-56%	17t-(13)-76%	19t-(8)-42%	
6	10t-(4)-40%	11t-(5)-45%	11t-(7)-64%	
7	8t-(4)-50%	10t-(4)-40%	11t-(6)-55%	
8	6t-(4)-67%	8t-(5)-63%	10t-(8)-80%	
Total Students tested	62	75	98	235
# at/above benchmark	40	49	65	154
% at/above benchmark	64.5	65.3	66.3	<b>65.5%</b>

n/a= not available

t= total students tested

( )= students at/above benchmark

## **Eighth Grade GPA data**

Four years of student GPA data was also reviewed to understand the achievement of students in their final year at Franklin school. This data is reflected in Table 10. GPA data was gathered from a total of 49 Franklin eighth graders over four consecutive years. The scores reveal that out of 49 students, 28 or 57% graduated with a 3.5 GPA or higher. A total of 75% of students (37) graduated with a 3.0 or higher. The highest tier was 14% of students (7) who graduated with a 4.0. And out of 49 students, 0% graduated with a GPA below 2.0 (Table 10).

## **Cohort Data**

To get an ending measure of achievement from students who matriculated through Franklin, eighth grade Iowa test scores were reviewed for a cohort of students continuously enrolled in Franklin from at least grades three through eight. The findings are presented in Table 11.

Cohort data reveals that 60% of students tested on the college level (13+) in ELA or Math. All students were above grade level in ELA with 80% testing at the 10<sup>th</sup> grade level or higher. Similarly, math scores reveal that 80% of students tested on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade level or higher. Complete composite scores reveal that 80% of students tested on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade level or higher. The complete composite is an Iowa Assessment measure that combines scores from core subject areas (ELA, math, social studies, and science). All students or 100% tested above grade level on the complete composite (Table 11). These heightened scores suggest that the longer

students attend Franklin school, the better they perform academically—findings similar to those from the Cognitive Genesis study (Thayer and Kido, 2012).

**Table 10:** Franklin Eighth Grade GPA scores

	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>
1	3.5	3.11	3.56	3.8
2	2.7	3.64	3.82	2.2
3	4.0	3.81	4.0	3.8
4	3.7	3.76	3.78	3.1
5	2.0	3.76	2.78	3.89
6	4.0	3.17	3.95	4.0
7	3.8	2.12	3.3	3.2
8	3.6	2.94	2.82	3.11
9	3.5		2.3	2.94
10	4.0		4.0	4.0
11			2.65	3.99
12			3.2	3.96
13			3.4	3.24
14			3.6	3.84
15			2.73	3.53
16			2.5	

*n=49*

**Table 11: Franklin Eighth grade Cohort data**

	<b>ELA total</b>	<b>Math total</b>	<b>Complete Composite</b>
Student 1	11.6	10.0	10.8
Student 2	13+	12.6	13+
Student 3	13+	13+	13+
Student 4	13+	8.1	10.6
Student 5	9.1	10.4	9.6

**National and State Comparative data**

National and state data from the U.S. Dept of Education’s National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was reviewed to provide additional context for student achievement at the national and state levels. National NAEP data represents both public and private schools nationwide. State NAEP data represents public schools within the state. State data was reviewed from the state where Franklin school is located (the name of the state is omitted to maintain anonymity of location). Data was gathered based on the available years 2015, 2017, and 2019 and reflect 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade achievement levels. National NAEP data for 2017 and 2019 reveal that 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students across the nation ranged between 34-41% proficiency levels in math and reading (Table 12). State NAEP data for years 2015, 2017, and 2019 reveal that 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students ranged between 32-42% proficiency levels in math and reading (Table 13).

State NAEP data was also reviewed by student group for reading and math. State data was gathered based on available years 2017 and 2019 and reflect 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade achievement levels by racial group. State NAEP data for 2017 reveal that Black 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students ranged between 19-27% proficiency in reading (Table 14). State NAEP data for 2019 reveal that Black 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students ranged between 14-23% proficiency in math (Table 15).

**Table 12: NAEP National Math and Reading Proficiency\*  
4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grades 2017 & 2019\*\***

	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade		8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	
	2017	2019	2017	2019
Math	40	41	34	34
Reading	37	35	36	34

\*scores represent percentage of students nationwide scoring at/above proficiency level

\*\*SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1990–2019 Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

**Table 13: NAEP State Math and Reading Proficiency\***  
4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grades 2015, 2017, 2019\*\*

	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade			8 <sup>th</sup> Grade		
Math	% at/above Basic	% at/above Proficient	at Advanced	% at/above Basic	% at/above Proficient	at Advanced
2019	75.78	39.11	10.99	65.02	32.59	11.81
2017	78.17	42.34	11.05	66.33	32.62	10.72
2015	78.94	40.15	7.86	70.70	34.69	9.87
Reading						
2019	64.22	35.09	11.05	72.83	35.99	5.20
2017	68.92	40.17	12.12	74.33	37.59	6.57
2015	67.59	36.53	9.50	76.22	37.37	5.27

\*scores represent percentage of students statewide scoring at/above proficiency level

\*\*SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1990–2019 Mathematics and Reading Assessments

**Table 14: NAEP State Reading Proficiency for Student Groups\***  
4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grades 2017\*\*

4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	%	% at/above Basic	% at/above Proficient	at Advanced
All	100	69	40	12
White	38	83	55	19
Black	32	57	27	5
Hispanic	19	53	22	5
Asian	7	87	65	25
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade				
All	100	74	38	7
White	40	86	52	10
Black	34	60	19	2
Hispanic	14	64	26	3
Asian	7	91	67	20

**Table 15: NAEP State Math Proficiency for Student Groups\***  
4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grades 2019\*\*

<b>4<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	%	% at/above Basic	% at/above Proficient	at Advanced
All	100	76	39	11
White	33	88	54	17
Black	34	63	23	3
Hispanic	20	69	27	4
Asian	7	96	80	40
<b>8<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>				
All	100	65	33	12
White	36	85	50	19
Black	34	46	14	3
Hispanic	17	48	18	4
Asian	8	88	62	35

\*scores represent percentage of students statewide scoring at/above proficiency level

\*\*SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1990–2019 Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

### Comparisons to National and State data

By multiple measures using school achievement data, Franklin students' achievement compares favorably to national and state data. It must be underscored that because of variations in standards, assessments, and proficiency designations across states, direct one to one comparisons of assessment data are inappropriate (Rosenberg, 2004; Smith, 2008). Rather, the above NAEP data is useful in simply providing a broad and general snapshot of national and state student performance.

The Iowa Assessment's proficiency designation is required for federal reporting to the US Dept of Education (Dunbar and Welch, 2015). On the Iowa Assessment's reading **proficiency** measure, Franklin's three-year longitudinal data reveals that 252 out of 252 third through eighth grade students or 100% were in grades testing proficient in reading (Table 6; Appendix C). On the Iowa Assessment's math **proficiency** measure, Franklin's three-year longitudinal data reveals that 242 out of 252 third through eighth grade students or 96% were in grades testing proficient in math (Table 6; Appendix C). On the Iowa Assessment's **national percentile ranking**, 349 out of 447 Franklin kindergarten through eighth grade students or 78% were in grades testing at or above the national norm (Table 4). On the Iowa Assessment's **grade equivalent** measure, 333 out of 447 Franklin kindergartners through eighth grade students or 74.4% were in grades testing at or above grade level (Table 5). On the Iowa Assessment's **ELA** measure, 434 out of 447 Franklin kindergarten through eighth grade students or 97% were in grades testing at or above grade level in ELA (Table 7). On the Iowa Assessment's **Math** measure, 219 out of 447 Franklin kindergarten through eighth grade students or 48.9% were in grades testing at or above grade level in math (Table 7). On the Star Reading Assessment, 166 out of 235 Franklin students (70.6%) in grades 1-8 tested at or above benchmark (Table 8). And on the Star Math Assessment, 154 out of 235 Franklin students (65.5%) tested at or above benchmark (Table 9). **GPA data** reveals that 75% of Franklin students graduate with a 3.0 or higher and 0% graduate with a GPA below 2.0. The broad snapshot reveals that large majorities of Franklin students are performing at higher levels of achievement on multiple measures.

Comparably, national NAEP data for 2017 and 2019 reveal that 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in public and private schools across the nation ranged between 34-41% proficiency

levels in math and reading (Table 12). State NAEP data for years 2015, 2017, and 2019 reveal that 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade public school students ranged between 32-42% proficiency levels in math and reading (Table 13). The difference in proficiency is even more striking with state racial data for Black students. State NAEP data for 2017 reveal that Black 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade public school students ranged between 19-27% proficiency in reading (Table 14). State NAEP data for 2019 reveal that Black 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade public school students ranged between 14-23% proficiency in math (Table 15). The broad snapshot of NAEP national and state data reveals that a minority of students across the nation are performing at high levels of achievement. NAEP achievement levels for Black students are dramatically lower. The above data reveal that large majorities of Franklin's students are performing at high achievement levels, whereas a minority of public and private school students are performing at high achievement levels both nationally and within the state. Franklin students' high achievement contrasts with low achievement levels for Black public school students within their state. The next section will now review research findings on the qualitative factors that may be influencing such achievement.

## **Findings for Research Questions 1-4**

Having presented findings on academic achievement at Franklin school, this chapter will now focus on the qualitative factors influencing this achievement. This study was guided by four research questions: RQ1- What are the factors that influence the academic, social, and cultural development of Black students attending a Black Seventh-day Adventist school? RQ2- To what extent, if any, do these academic, social, and cultural factors facilitate the liberation of Black students? RQ3- To what extent, if any, are elements of resistance occurring within this school? RQ4- How does the faith-based philosophy of this school contribute to the academic development and success of Black students? Findings provide rich description, detail, and answers to these questions and are now presented.

### ***RQ1- What are the factors that influence the academic, social, and cultural development of Black students attending a Black Seventh-day Adventist school?***

Six themes emerged from participants and provide context for the academic, social, and cultural factors influencing students at Franklin school. These themes include: 1) “The Need for Black Space: School History”, 2) “It Takes a Village: Strong Social Networks of School, Home, and Church”, 3) “The Mission is Possible: Missional Pedagogy and High-Quality Teachers”, 4) “The Intersection of Race, Class, and Faith: Black Excellence, God, and Mobility”, 5) “A Space of Opportunity: Social Learning and Social Consciousness”, and 6) “Supporting Teachers and Supporting Students: School Administration and Behavior Management”. These themes are discussed in detail in the subsequent section.

**“The Need for Black Space: School History”**

Participants shared the history of the school’s founding which centered around an expressed need for a Seventh-day Adventist school for Black students. Although there were also financial considerations, the racial exclusion and bias experienced by parents and students at the local predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist school convinced a group of parents that it was time to establish their own school. Janet, in particular, shared the financial reasons that led to the school’s establishment:

So, the school started being channeled because of financial reasons. The school that our students, our children were going to, you would have to pay more tuition money. If you went to a school that was not in the same conference that you were in, you had to pay more. ...Well, it got one year that it was [increased] twice as much. Each year it was going up. And then it became twice as much. This one year it had been one figure, but the next year it went up, that's what non-constituent rate was, and our pastor said we need a school.

Alvin, Miriam, and Christine also discussed the racial challenges Black students faced at other area schools. For example, Alvin shared:

They went to a school that was not predominantly African-American. Another Adventist institution in the area, and the students were not being treated fairly. And it was blatant from my understanding. So a group of parents came together from Greater Hope SDA church and Central City SDA church [pseudonyms] at the time and they said they wanted to start their own school and they did. ..So that school was founded literally as a place for African-American students, students of African descent to go and be treated fairly to be treated a certain way to be treated with dignity and respect. And that again was the foundation or the impetus for that school being started.

As Superintendent of schools at the time of these racial challenges, Miriam reflected on her role in initiating plans for the establishing of Franklin school.

And I knew there was a need for it because parents from these other schools in other conferences were calling me to ask, what could I do about some injustice at the school where their child was going? ...I got several of these calls, of course. And then that's when I started dreaming about... We need a school in the North, we need a school. And the dream started materializing into some plans.

Christine elaborated on the exclusion and lack of belonging that Black families and their children were experiencing at predominantly White schools.

I think the parents were dissatisfied about their children going across town and the treatment that they were receiving. I think it's more like the kids, not that they were receiving maltreatment, but they didn't feel like they belonged. They weren't sent to the front of the line. You know, and sometimes that's all you need for someone to say, go to the front of the line. So they didn't feel like they belonged. And so parents got together and along with the Piedmont SDA conference [pseudonym] and said, we can do this. They had the confidence in their ability to establish a school that can train their children.

Many years after Franklin was established, Maria shared how she was turned away by a White administrator at her job interview for a teaching position at a particular Adventist school and steered to Franklin school. She expressed surprise at the racial encounter. She noted:

So, I get a call from Boulder SDA school [pseudonym] ...and they say, you know, we were ready to interview you. We hear very much from Gateway Academy that you're a great teacher, we want to see you. So I went there for an interview and I guess I didn't meet the requirement [Maria points to her skin]. You know? Because the minute he saw me, he said, Oh, you? and I said, yeah? He was like, I was expecting something else. I was like, okay. He said, you know what, your people, literally, your people are on the other side of town. And I was just like "my people" what does that mean? You know, I never heard of that. And he was like, your people are on the other side of town. You

should go over there. And I was like, okay, what's the name of the school? And he said, Franklin SDA school [pseudonym]. And then I was like, Oh, okay. So, I really, at first, I didn't even understand what he meant by 'your people'.

Maria was confused by this racial experience. Additionally, Janet expressed the desire she and other Black parents had for their children to receive an education where they could become confident in themselves and their abilities. She described how in-school bias was preventing this from becoming a reality. Specifically, she explained:

The very first thing was that our children were not being treated equally in our integrated schools, largely White schools with very few African-American children there. ...Our children didn't get the opportunity. Even if they were good, they still were not given the opportunity. We wanted our children to have the very best self-worth there was. [We wanted them to know] that they were very valuable. That they are capable of doing whatever they want to do. ...There was nothing more to tell them or show them except, take our children and put them into an environment, into an all-Black environment where they could develop to the best of their ability and come out feeling good about themselves.

Participants explained that Franklin school was established as a direct result of racial exclusion and mistreatment felt by the Black families whose children attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist schools. Black parents organized with their local Black Seventh-day Adventist churches (Greater Hope SDA and Central City SDA churches) and the Piedmont SDA Conference (the ecclesiastical governing organization) to establish Franklin SDA school with the expressed intention that this school serve as a welcoming place for Black students—a place of *belonging*.

Christine and Janet expressed how decades since its founding, Franklin school is still needed today. Christine explained:

It is needed today more than ever because we... you know, the country is just at the point where they're starting to define, what is diversity? What is equity? What is inclusion? We've already done that in our practice. ... Our kids more than ever need to have a sense of belonging and need to be clear about who they are in terms of their identity. Yeah. We don't have time now for identity crisis. ... And to be confident, you know who you are, then you have a certain amount of confidence and I'm worthy. This is who I am and I'm enough and I'm worthy.

Janet explained how at Franklin, teachers look out for Black students instead of being afraid to teach them to their full potential. She articulated:

And our schools, we look out. The Black school, we look out for the Black students. We look out for those little boys who were being brought up by single parents. We're not afraid of them. To have them in the classroom and the other teachers are afraid and just leave them alone and let them do what they want to do, whether it's learn or not learn. We give the students an opportunity to grow to all their full potential. ...Black schools are still needed. They're still needed. Yes.

In sum, participants expressed the ongoing need for Black space for Black children and they viewed Franklin SDA school as the embodiment of that space. Altogether, participants shared stories of racial bias and exclusion that were negatively impacting the confidence and opportunity of Black children in other local area schools. Parents and church leaders, therefore, organized to create a safe and affirming space for their children leading to the founding of Franklin SDA school. They viewed this space as still being necessary today.

**“It Takes a Village: Strong Social networks of School, Home, and Church”**

Students at Franklin school live within a particular community of strong social networks—an integration of school, home, and church. The bonds and support established within these networks are mutually reinforcing. Participants shared how they believed these interlocking networks strengthened the overall achievement and development of their students. For example, Christine explained:

Yeah, the social piece is the students become each other's friends as they become friends for life. ...And I became a single parent at that time and I said, I need a village. I need a village to raise my child because I didn't have relatives here in the area. And if I'm going to raise him, I can't do it by myself as a single parent. So, I have the church. I was secure and I said, okay, I'm putting him in the school. This is going to be our village and we're just going to stick with it. And it worked out because the church reinforced the school, the school reinforced the home, and the triangle was tight. The triangle was tight and it worked for him and most of the kids in his class.

Like Christine, Marcus described how students at Franklin spend significant amounts of time together in school, in after-school programs, and in weekend church activities. Along with similarities they shared with their teachers, these elements combined to create a tight communal atmosphere at Franklin. Marcus shared:

Well, firstly there's community. So, when the child can see or look at the instructor and they already see similarities, you're already a part of my community. ...And what we have is similar to other communities around the United States, where there is a commonality, there's a commonality in race. There's a commonality in religion. There's a commonality in, in some cases, gender where all of those things combined in a perfect storm. So, when the student is taking instruction, they've seen themselves in where the instruction is coming from. And I think that that plays a key role in the success of the

students also because it is such a close-knit community. Oftentimes the families that enroll their children in these institutions or in this institution in particular are part of the church community on the weekend, the school community during the week. There are, it becomes an extended family, so to speak, it reaches beyond the eight-hour school day, six-hour school day. ...They're in the extracurriculars. Then they're in their church seeing [each other] together. They're in their Pathfinders together, they're in their AYS [Adventist Youth Society] together. They're in their church basketball team together and their school basketball team, the dance team. I mean, it's literally, they're together more than they're not, but it is essentially an extended family.

Similar to Marcus' description, the school's website highlights a number of academic and extracurricular offerings including choir, dance, stem club, the National Junior Honor Society, student council, Kung Fu, chess, drama, arts club, basketball, soccer, and track and field. These multiple offerings add to the communal environment at Franklin. Miriam described the integrated layers of parents, teachers, students, and school board within the Franklin community. Specifically, she shared:

So, our board and the parents, the whole community works so well together. So, when you say, what is it that makes them work? It's the families. It's the parents. It's the teachers, it's the board, but it is also the blessings of the Lord. ...And so, they [the students] have this friendship, this bonding with others so that they can have their social structure. Their culture within a culture.

Alvin shared how students' bonds strengthen in a manner where they begin to see their peers as extended family. For example, he explained:

Again, one of the things that I noticed, those students, they became less of classmates and more like family. ...You don't get that in public school. You may have some close

friends, but to have a whole class come together like a family, that's because of the environment that they went through at Franklin school, and you see it.

At Franklin school the teachers help facilitate this familial environment. Marcus and Lisa, who are parents of students, reflected on the role teachers play in creating a sense of community.

Marcus articulated:

...The teachers are amazing. I believe they look at the students more as... extended family than just a student. And in many cases, you have relationships with the parents, right? ...So, there's a connection almost everywhere. So, it's almost as if you're being raised by your village and that's, that is key to the success of the students.

Similar to Marcus, Lisa appreciated the comfort her boys experienced being themselves. She also shared her confidence in teachers as she believed teachers treated students as if they were their own children. She reflected:

What I've seen with them is this freedom to be themselves. So, you know, I have two boys there and they are themselves. You know, all of it, you know, and his teachers, they use that to bring out his excellence and his intelligence. And they treat them like they're their kids. I think that's the safest part for me is that, you know, when we used to drop them off, I felt like I was dropping them off with family. ...And I really think it was the teachers that encouraged that closeness.

Participants described a high degree of parental involvement within Franklin SDA school.

Participants, who are parents, reflected on their own experiences and motivations for being involved in the school. These parents had a keen understanding and belief that their engagement was critical in supporting the academic success and social development of their children. For example, Marcus expounded:

The ability to have parental involvement whether it be through the home and school association or the relationship that the teachers have, or the parents have with the teachers... that also plays a key role. I'm a believer that no matter how smart a child is, they will generally not be successful without parental influence. So anytime you see a parent 100% involved and, and keyed in on the education of their child, the child is successful. So, that's also, and that's a welcome environment, at Franklin. So we're not pushing the parents away... it is a partnership. And I believe that partnership fosters a lot of success.

In addition to Marcus, Michael admitted that he was heavily involved in his children's lives and took on various volunteer roles at Franklin school. He believed his volunteerism was necessary to support other students as well as to provide financial support to the school, as Franklin does not receive public funding. Michael explained:

Yes. I'm involved. I'm one of those, they call me Dadzilla when my kids were small, I'm a helicopter parent. ...I like to help out where its needed. And with it being a private school without public assistance, you know resources are all, you know, wearing multiple hats and doing everything they can. So I like to, you know, not only see my children succeed, but I like to see all the kids in the school, so wherever I can help, you know, I, I try to help out. And so, you know, volunteering, financially, you know, whatever it is.

Paulette described how as a parent, she often worked remotely from the school in order to support different school events. Her experience characterized the level of involvement of many Franklin parents. She shared:

So yes, I'm involved in that I'm like the afterschool parent. ...If they're having a special party, I'm bringing the chips and the food and, you know. And actually, there were days because I worked so far that if there was a special event, I would stay for the event and just, my office would be in the teachers' lounge. ...So I am involved.

Like Paulette, Lisa explained that her involvement as a parent was driven by a desire to ensure teachers knew her and understood that she aimed to partner with them for the academic success of her kids. Lisa attested:

And for me, one of the main reasons why I get involved when my kids are in a new space is because I want the teachers to know me. I want the teachers to know me, and I want them to know that I am their partner and not their critic. ...And especially because they have shown, these teachers have shown me that they are trustworthy and that they want the absolute best for my kids. So, because of that, I'm involved for their sake. Sometimes I would, I would for the teacher's sake, I would sometimes volunteer time to be in class, you know whatever, what do you need me to do today?

Teachers at Franklin school also shared ways in which the school creates activities and experiences that foster a communal environment. Natalie explained:

I think also the social interaction. Lots of after school activities, we have the family events like right now, our parents are begging for another movie night. ...The social events allow parents not only to get together, but the children also to see each other outside of school. And so that has been a good part of developing relationships in Franklin. So the concerts, the strawberry festivals, those extra events, like someone just asked if we're having STEM night. So, I think those extra-curricular, social, but academic events help to draw people in.

Vanessa described how teachers create multiple programs and experiences to help facilitate students' comradery and to ensure their proper social development.

Well, I mean, I, I think that the school puts a lot of emphasis on programming and experiences, kids having shared experiences, learning how to get along with one another. Even when I think about like even now during the pandemic, we have monthly meetups kids. We have life skills classes, things that you might not necessarily get

somewhere else again, showing that they're interested in the whole student, making sure that kids are developing appropriately.

Like Vanessa, Paulette noted the impact of the afterschool activities and the connections they yield amongst the students. She explained how these strong connections led her child to want to be with her school community even outside of school hours. Paulette recounted:

I think the afterschool activities. All of the kids for the most part are involved in something. Listen, they don't want to leave school. It's six o'clock. We have to go and they want to stay in the gym. So that speaks to so much... It speaks to community. ...Shannon [Paulette's daughter] feels left out sometimes because she can't, she doesn't go to a church where everybody else goes. She misses when she's not with her community. There's something about the connections. And she wants to be with the kids who are excelling.

A particular dynamic noted was the involvement of Black men in the school. Lisa and Paulette described a robust presence and engagement of Black fathers at Franklin school. They reflected on an organic parent network within the school and the development of parental social bonds that similarly created community. Lisa noted:

My husband has found so much comradery in the school because he can be his fully Black involved self because he sees other men doing the same thing. And to the point where if there is a child whose father is not available that day, we've seen parents step in. ...I mean, look, we all know what the myth is, cause it really is a myth that Black fathers are not involved. ...And so, Franklin school will just shut that myth down. Come spend a day at our school and the fathers are there in the morning. They're there throughout the day. They're there for science fair. They're there teaching kids sports, like Michael said, you know, they're just everywhere. Black men are everywhere. ...And the positive reinforcement that our kids feel from Black men, that's really important. I have two boys. And so, there's no sense in their mind that being excellent, being

available, being attentive, this is not like a thing they'll have to figure out some time later. This is what they've been seeing being modeled to them.

Paulette agreed with Lisa and explained that the presence of Black men at Franklin was not anomalous. She recounted a school parking lot experience she had to describe this presence:

There are definitely Black men around. And I can tell you, one day I was at the school volunteering doing something. I can't remember what, and I came out of the school and there was like a Black male caucus in the parking lot. And I took a picture. I took several pictures that day, because that is the culture. That is the culture. ...And it was almost every morning, like after the drop off, the dudes, the fathers were hanging out having their own conversation and they're involved. ..I was thinking about the awards assemblies and the, you know, all of the programs. And there are always Black men present. There are Black fathers present who are cheering, you know. So I mean, mothers, of course mothers are there, but it is not an anomaly. It's not an outlier to have a Black male.

Participants described a strong communal network within Franklin school facilitated by an integration of school, home, and church—a village. Within this village, teachers help create a familial atmosphere with their students in the classroom and plan school programs that bring parents, students, and teachers together. Students spend a significant amount of time with their peers during school hours, after school activities, and weekend church activities. Parents are highly involved with the teachers and school community and have developed their own parental networks of social support. Black men are visibly present on the school campus and involved in multiple areas of school life. Altogether, participants depicted a vibrant community of parents, teachers, and church life that converge to create a durable band of support around their children.

**“The Mission is Possible: Missional Pedagogy and High-Quality Teachers”**

A core component of this strong community at Franklin school is its team of educators. Participants expressed how the particular pedagogical approach and practice of Franklin’s teachers leads to a heightened and favorable result with students’ learning and development. Participants shared how teachers lead with an intense sense of mission toward their students. This “*missional pedagogy*” has several characteristics including: a) is centered around the needs and gifts of the student, b) features high-commitment, high-investment, and high-expectations, c) is culturally responsive, and d) facilitates critical thinking. In addition to this particular pedagogy, the educational staff is highly qualified and diverse. Small class sizes enable one on one attention and individualization with students. Also, teachers utilize a denominational curriculum but are not limited by it, frequently bringing in other resources to enhance learning. Finally, teachers collaborate in teams sharing practices, techniques, and challenges in a way that strengthens the overall learning program at Franklin school.

**Missional Pedagogy: a) Student centered-** Maria, Natalie, and Vanessa described their particular educational approach in the classroom that centers the needs of the student. Maria explained:

My pedagogy was always, the student is the most important. Not curriculum, not extracurricular activities. You know, the student is who guides the curriculum. ...Once you let the students explore their strengths, discover their weaknesses, they themselves will guide, ask the questions and you take those opportunities to incorporate what they have to learn. But when you force that curriculum into them, what do you say? This is what we have to make because it's a checklist that I have. You will see that it would just explode in your face. At the end of the year, they would not have retained one single thing, nothing at all. ...[But] when you put the students first and you teach to the

students' strengths and weaknesses and you let them guide a curriculum. That's what you get at the end. The students do not forget. They keep building on what you already taught them.

Natalie described how she implements this student-centered pedagogy. A part of her approach is to stretch students further than they believe they can go. She shared:

My philosophy is that any student can learn. And so, in my planning and preparation for my students, I try to understand their learning styles as well as their needs. And so, I cater my lessons to ensure that I'm reaching the students' needs as well as exposing them to a little more than they need. Just so that I can give them the opportunity to grow. So quite often the kids may feel like, well, it's a little difficult, but I encourage them to just try because what you know, and you push yourself a little more, it can help you to reach farther.

Vanessa is intentional building authentic and caring relationships with her students and believes that this effort allows her to first connect with them and then enables her to effectively teach them. She explained:

I have always been of the mindset of relationship first. Okay. Kids will do whatever. They'll do anything for you. If they love you. Like they will do things they never thought that they can do if they know that you love them and that you are interested in them. I always start with building a relationship first. And even, and that way, even if I come down hard or even if I I'm getting on their nerves and I'm making them, do they know that love is there and that I want what's best for them. So that's where i begin. Yeah. That's where I begin.

*Missional Pedagogy: b) High commitment-High investment-High expectations* – Teachers at Franklin have a high level of commitment to each student, invest their time and resource into

them, and have high expectations of their students. Maria elaborated on this commitment and high expectation. She noted:

And at Franklin I noticed that the strength is in the teachers, the teachers care about their students individually. ...It's always like 24-7, you're committed to the success of the kids. And you do anything to make sure that they grasp the concept, that they know how to do the work and to push them to do to their maximum abilities. Instead of saying, Oh, that's a C that's good. At Franklin, at least the teachers that were there when I was there always had that mentality that they saw the student's potential. They never left it at the middle or lower. You always have to be the best.

Lisa discussed how teachers at Franklin exhibit strong commitment and spiritual purpose in their teaching students in general, and her children in particular. She admitted that she had not experienced similar levels of commitment at other schools. She reflected:

Yeah, I think the other thing is the commitment from the teachers. ...So, I've really experienced all of the teachers from pre-K to fifth grade now. And they all treat it like a ministry, you know, like it's a God ordained purpose. They give them so much time. ...They come to your kids with a sense of purpose. And so, for me, it's the teachers at Franklin. That's why my kids are there because...the teacher and the child, the student and teacher relationship, I have not seen that with my kids at any other school.

Like Lisa, Natalie described how Franklin's teachers provide additional investment and support for students and families outside the required realm of their professional responsibilities.

Natalie shared:

Well, whatever the needs are that we can help, we can assist, we do. So in some cases, parents are not able to financially afford aftercare/ before care, whatever it is. So, teachers are able to do that. I myself have kept students in the mornings so that parents don't have to pay. ...But because we see the need, we create an atmosphere where it is

like a morning something so that we can provide that assistance to parents because otherwise some of those kids would not be able to attend our school. And I have also assisted with transportation. ...So what I have done in the past, up to the last time we're in the building, I would stay late until the parents could come and get their kids.

Former Franklin principal and current superintendent Alvin agreed with other participants and identified teacher dedication as a key component that impacted the quality of Franklin's program. He described a high level of commitment and investment that led to them holding higher expectations for all students. Alvin articulated:

I think that the key that separates Franklin from all the schools is the teacher's dedication. The teachers intrinsically want the students to do well. Very rarely you'll hear a teacher trying to do the least for their student. They always want to do the most. ...The way I watched them, make sure they were successful. They could be very hard as a parent they were hard on my kids, but they were hard on them in love because their expectations were a lot higher. ...I saw it with everyone's kid. I saw teachers who didn't get paid to stay after school and do tutoring stay after school and do tutoring. I saw teachers that were there from sunup to sundown because they wanted what was best for kids.

*Missional Pedagogy: c) Culturally Responsive-* Teachers at Franklin are responsive to the cultural identities, perspectives, and needs of their students. They view this sensitivity as necessary, helping engender student trust, and preparatory for the student's social reality. Natalie detailed this cultural responsiveness:

I have some Filipinos and so what I could do, I try to be sensitive to what the standards are and the expectations. So I, I keep close to the parents. So I will know what the expectations are in their culture. What is right culturally and what is not while at the same time being sensitive to the fact that I have more people from my culture, who I

can relate to in my class. So I become sensitive to the cultural norms for other cultures and integrate that with my teaching.

Vanessa elaborated on how Black teachers are able to respond to the cultural perspectives and realities of Black students in ways that non-Black teachers cannot. She spoke to the harsh social realities that Black children face and how she intentionally discussed these challenges and strategies for survival in the classroom:

So, they [Black teachers] know how to get me to where I need to be from my perspective. Some other races may not be able to do that. They may sympathize with me, but they're not going to be able to walk in my shoes or be where I've been. I think that Black teachers in very specific ways, we make a concerted effort to prepare students for what's going to be in the future. I don't see that in other schools. I think that that helps build the Black student up helps build their confidence because they're prepared for whatever's coming.

Vanessa continued:

Also teaching our kids how to navigate the world as a Black person. Many White people can't teach that. Even if it's not necessarily academic, but I know I've been in conversation with my young men how they interact with women, how they interact with other young men. How they look, how they present themselves, how they, people will look at them, how they need to react, how they need to just get through this police stop. ...Like those kinds of things. You're not gonna learn elsewhere. You know, those are things that we talk about. ...And our, my perspective is to teach my child to survive and to know her right, to know who she is to know that this is how they look at you, but that doesn't mean that's who you are.

*Missional Pedagogy: d) facilitates critical thinking-* A part of the school creed states that students will develop their “power to think, and not be mere reflectors of other men’s

thoughts”<sup>9</sup>. Maria, Natalie, and Vanessa described how they facilitate this critical thinking in the classroom. Maria explained how she encouraged critical thinking in the classroom through the use of educational videos:

So, they have to pay attention. They have to critically think of all the different clues that the video gave. And they have to arrive to a conclusion according to the ending. And that is just, I remember that it helped them so much that whenever they would pick up a book, it was like so easy for them to make the transition. They just pick up clues from the pictures, pick up clues from, from different words. And then they were able to tell me what the story was about with no stop. They were just so fast at getting that main point. So for me, that helped them to think critically more instead of me giving them the answers all the time.

Natalie shared a critical thinking exercise she uses in her classroom:

So, a student may answer a question and my students know that they can raise their hand to say, can I challenge that person? And you're challenging them by using argument that's reasonable, that's logical, and that is factual. So that is something that we do generally in our school and specifically in my class. And the kids love to challenge. They even challenge me. And I like that. ...Because it tells me that they're not just, you know, waiting for me to point to them, but they want to see a different perspective. ...And that's how I teach them.

Vanessa gave an example of how she facilitated critical thinking in a class discussion as students were reading Martin L. King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”. She shared:

They're able to use the context clues. They're able to say, well, what could that possibly mean? What connection can I make to that? How can I apply this to the world and my place in the world? What was he talking about? Justice, justice? What justice is he

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<sup>9</sup> See School creed in Appendix H

waiting for and why is it being delayed? Is delayed the same as denied? ...I can't tell you what anybody else is doing, but I know that for me, only thing that I know that increases test scores is spending time in critical reading.

### *Highly Qualified and Diverse Staff*

Participants not only shared in-depth insights into teacher pedagogy, but they also spoke to the quality and diversity of teachers at Franklin school. Most teachers have graduate degrees and receive ongoing professional development. Miriam and Alvin spoke to teacher quality. Miriam elaborated:

The quality of the teachers, every one of them. I mean, you know, the teachers are different and there are some parents who will say this teacher's so good. And the other parents will say, this teacher is so good. And some teachers might be better for certain children, their teaching style, their child's learning style. And that could be said, but as a principal, looking at all of those teachers, they were all good. They were all above average. They... knowing their craft, knowing their content, and knowing how to teach it, how do you get children to learn, they knew that. And yes, there was all on-going staff development constantly.

Alvin attested to what he described as the high quality of teachers at Franklin. He observed:

I would say this I've worked in education for well over 20 years and I've seen teachers from Virginia to DC to Maryland. And I would say that GE Peters has some of the best has and had some of the best teachers I've ever seen. So, great teachers, great teachers there. And from a, from an educational standpoint, there was one point where all of our teachers had a master's degree except for maybe the one on staff. ...So, and they're not required to have that degree. So, then that showed a level of the level of importance of improving their craft, becoming master teachers, by getting these additional degrees.

While Alvin explained teacher qualifications, Marcus discussed how teachers receive ongoing professional development throughout the school year and the summer. He shared, “I would say the teacher quality is very good. ...There's ongoing professional development. ...We also encourage the teachers to get additional training throughout the summers. There are certain workshops that are given.”

In addition to the teacher quality and professional development, several participants reflected on the diversity of the teaching staff and its benefit to the learning environment.

Alvin remarked:

They were African descent except for one or two. ...At least she was, we had a teacher that was of Asian descent and we had one that was Latino. And then we had, we had another, we had two others that were Latino, but they were Afro Latinos. ...And then the rest of the teachers there were they were either West Indian or they were just African-American. So that was the makeup of the teachers. ...It made a difference to the students again, because when you walk into the classroom and your teacher looks like you, that that just makes a huge difference to the student.

Like Alvin, Marcus believed that Franklin's diverse staff benefits students by offering them the full perspective of racial identities, preparing them for the broader world, and helping them develop cultural competence. Marcus added:

The staff is primarily people of color, not all of Black. We have Asian staff, we have White staff. We have I think it's, it's fairly diverse. And I think that's to our benefit because the children get a lot of their instruction again from Black instructors. But they're also not blind to the fact that we're not the only ones here. You also need to have the full perspective. ...I want to build you up, while you're [here] and prepare you for the world that you're going through.

Franklin school has a low student to teacher ratio. Because of these small classroom sizes, teachers are better able to meet the individual needs of each student. Denominational guidelines require no more than 20-1 maximum ratio, and 10-1 for grades K and below. Alvin identified the small class sizes as helping teachers better hone in on the needs of each student. Alvin explained how small class sizes and individualized attention from teachers are benefits to students' learning at Franklin school.

#### *Small Class Size & Individualization*

Well, a couple of other things, if I had to put my finger on it. Number one, they have a smaller setting at a school like Franklin, so the teacher to student ratio allows for teachers to be able to provide that one-on-one attention or that small group instruction with. You don't get that in a public school.

Similarly, Natalie believes that the small class sizes allow teachers to provide differentiated instruction and additional supports to help students:

I can think of two off the top of my head. The first one being our class size. Classes are small enough to allow teachers to get around to students and to work individually. Secondly, teachers are able to provide extra differentiation for kids. So if they're not getting it in class, I happen to know that most of our staff members stay back after school, just so that they can provide the extra that the student needs.

Christine and Lisa expressed how they witnessed the benefits of this individualization and support with their own children. Christine explained, "Having a classroom of 20 or fewer students, it allows the teacher to delve more deeply and to support the child." Lisa also noted:

And it really was this thing that teaching to your child. Right. So a lot of schools will promote and say yeah, we do individualized teaching. A lot of schools say that, but I can say that my kids are experiencing that.

Finally, teachers use the denominational curriculum standards to guide them in teaching students the concepts and skills they need to know. Teachers acknowledged the limitations of the curriculum and their regular practice of integrating other resources into the classroom to ensure students received what they needed. Where teachers believed the curriculum was not challenging enough, they brought in additional resources to maximize learning growth. Teachers also work together in Cohort Leadership Teams (CLTs) that allow them opportunity to dialogue across grades, share successes and challenges, sharpen their practice and group knowledge, and develop a unified educational program from preK-8. Alvin discussed the strength of the curriculum:

### *Curriculum & Collaboration*

Number one the curriculum is one element that contributes to the success of the school. ...The results from this assessment [CognitiveGenesis study] shows that the Adventist curriculum outperforms many others schools across the country. The curriculum itself was, was strong.

Teachers use this denominational curriculum which is standards-based as a framework for their instruction. Natalie gave additional detail on the curriculum:

Well, the curriculum that we have is...the North American division curriculum standards. And this curriculum caters for the all around development of the student. It is standard-based, which is good. So, kids can start anywhere they go in the world because the standards, once you teach to the standards, then the content comes naturally. And so, it is aligned by grades so that the students get what they need based on their grades, but

across spectrum we are building upon...it's a curriculum that allows us to build upon what we learn year after year. So, the third graders get a little taste and then it consolidates. And the fourth grade, then the fifth grade, we keep adding to it and expanding them as stretch them as they go along.

When teachers felt the curriculum did not meet the needs of their students, they used other resources. Natalie elaborated on this flexibility and integration of other resources:

Sometimes it meets our needs... other times, well. I think we are flexible enough to see what our kids need, and sometimes we have to draw away from the curriculum to build on what they need and then bring them back. ...But that is not bad in itself because it allows us the opportunity to draw from several sources we need. ...Some of the books that may not be in our curriculum standards, we still expose them because we want them to have the knowledge. A lot of times the books are not necessarily to our culture...speak to our culture. So we expose them to that.

Maria believed some materials within the curriculum were not challenging enough for the high expectations teachers at Franklin have of their students. She noted:

Some of the materials that the NAD produces, I think that is not challenging enough for the level of challenge that GE Peters teachers like to give. ...And I think that's why the teachers fight with that curriculum and use it just as a supplement instead of the curriculum, you know.

Teacher collaboration is facilitated in Cohort Leadership Teams (CLTs). Natalie and Maria described this teacher collaboration. Teachers work together in planning teams to build the overall academic program at Franklin. Natalie shared:

We have what we call CLTs (Cohort Leadership Teams), those are groups, and we meet at least once a month and we discuss what the issues are. And sometimes these things come up, how would I deal with this issue or that issue? And so we come together and

make each other aware of some of the sensitivities that we may need to address. We address them in staff meetings as well. ...So pre-K to two that's, one leadership team, three to five, that's another, they're like clusters and then six to eight. So we're addressing issues that are common in those areas there, and then we bring our findings to staff meeting, that we can discuss. So the pre-k teachers pre-K to two, they're feeding us the next level and then we're feeding to the next level. So we're all conscious and aware of what's happening or what's needed in our school.

Maria explained how these planning teams helped integrate teacher styles to the benefit of teachers, students, and the academic program. She noted:

One thing that Mr. Alvin did that helped us combine more, our styles of teaching is with the clusters [CLTs]. We would get together. And we'll say, okay, I'm doing this and it's working fine. Somebody else would say, I have an issue with this type of learning. What do you recommend? And then we give each other ideas and we try to implement it, tweak it, according to what the teacher tried to find a way to incorporate the suggestions. And that helped a lot.

Teachers are a fundamental strength of Franklin school. Teachers approach their teaching with an intense sense of mission. This missional pedagogy a) centers the needs of each student, b) causes teachers to approach their students with high commitment-high investment-high expectations, c) employs a culturally responsive teaching approach, and d) facilitates critical thinking in the classroom. Teachers are highly qualified, most having graduate degrees, have ongoing professional development, and comprise an overall diverse educational staff. Small class sizes at Franklin school enable individualized attention for each student. And teachers use a denominational curriculum while collaborating with other teachers to build a strong and cohesive learning environment across all grades.

**“The Intersection of Race, Class, and Faith: Black Excellence, God, and Mobility”**

At Franklin school the convergence of race, class, and faith create an impactful experience that positively supports the achievement and development of its students. As a predominantly Black school with Black educators and administrators, the school emphasizes racial pride or “Black excellence” integrating Black historical and cultural knowledge within the learning in a manner that bolsters students’ confidence, esteem, self-concept, and achievement. Students and teachers at Franklin also come from a variety of diverse cultural backgrounds. This diversity is emphasized and celebrated within the school creating an environment of awareness, tolerance, and acceptance of cultural difference and similarity. Parents’ reasons for sending their children to Franklin school included views that it was a place where their Black children could be embraced, and their humanity affirmed.

As a private Christian school, Franklin employs a faith-based approach to education. Participants reflected on how they believed this approach reinforced students’ belief in their ability to learn. Faith-based values taught within the school help instill pride and self-worth and lead students to develop high personal and academic expectations. Educators shared how students are instructed with faith-based perspectives and use faith as a lens through which they interpret and critique their world.

Finally, centered within an urban metropolitan area, Franklin school is comprised of a mix of families from lower class to upper middle-class socio-economic backgrounds. Participants shared how Franklin families leveraged their resources to enhance their children’s mobility through education. They explained how the education Franklin students receive places

them on a track for college and career readiness, and most importantly infuses them with character. The following are participants' reflections on this intersection of race, class, and faith.

### Race

Janet, Miriam, and Maria expressed how Franklin's Black school environment helped students develop positive self-identity, promoted student confidence, and provided opportunities for Black students which they might not receive in other schools. Janet shared:

It enables Black students to see themselves in a very positive way. It enables them to be able to do things that they might not have the opportunity to do in another, even at an integrated school. ...Because it lets the student know that they can do anything and everything and believe it or not some atmospheres that they're in, makes them think that they're not able to do things and they're not give them the opportunity to do things. And they sometimes are even rated or graded differently because of someone else's perception of what they think they can do and what they think they can't do.

Similar to Janet, Miriam identified what she deemed to be incorrect frameworks for Black self-concept and explained how educators at Franklin school adopted a different framework for Black self-esteem and possibility. She explained:

And I said you know how we used to say things like you're as good as any White child. You're as good as any person—that right there is a problem. You're not as good. Some of them are as good as you. And so, in a Black school, like Franklin, we're not teaching kids that they're as good as somebody else or they can do as well as some other group. No, you're already putting the other group in a certain place. We're putting you in that place. Not that you're supposed to go around being conceited now, or thinking that

you're better than other people, but you know you're a child of God. You already have so much. And there are others who may be as good as you.

Students at Franklin are built up with pride and a sense of identity. Maria shared how these efforts helped to develop Franklin's students into leaders:

I think it gives them a sense of pride and a sense of identity. ...A lot of students of our students, if they're not built up when they are little, yes, with this pride with this is, you know, I am who I am and God helped me. And I'm special. I am intelligent and Franklin teachers tell that to the kids every day through the programs, through the classes, you know, speaking engagements, the learning how to speak up in public. And that's one of the things that Gateway Academy, you know, would always highlight. They always say whenever a kid comes from Franklin, they knew that they were going to be leaders. Wherever they get [there], they become leaders. They are not in the shadows. They want to take leadership positions...that is a testament to the work and the excellence that we teach.

Alvin, along with several teachers and parents, described a culture of what they termed "Black excellence" existing within the school. Alvin reflected:

Franklin was founded on that with that culture in mind, build a place for our students to be better. ...We exposed them, not just to what the, what was out there, but we allowed people to be exposed to them, to see the culture of what **Black excellence** looked like. And that was what I was going for as leader. ...This is a place for Black excellence. ...And that's why there was certain things that we, that I know as a leader when I had conversations with teachers, it was, we can't provide anything that's subpar. ...So yeah, I think it was a, it was a culture. If I had to put a stamp on it, I think it was a culture of pride, a culture of Black excellence, a culture of success. And I think it was something that was built over time and I think it was intentional. But ultimately it wasn't me as principal, that's the culture that, and again, I want to be clear that was the culture that the school was founded on.

He went on to detail how the school used events like the Black history program to highlight Black historical achievements and instill pride in students' heritage and capabilities. Alvin noted:

One of the things that we're very intentional about that a lot of the schools didn't do, we had a Black history program every year. And that Black history program for me, I believe was pivotal in making sure that we, we highlighted African-American achievement. We also... brought the alumni back for career day. And we were intentional about using alumni for Franklin because we wanted them to see that if you're here now, you can be an attorney down the road, you can be a doctor because everyone whose coming in to speak to you, they sat in the same desks. They sat in the same desk years ago and now look where they are. ...And, and for me, that was intentional about building that African-American pride in them. ...I wanted them to feel that in their foundation at Franklin and it showed because many of those students, they would go on and they showed their ability to lead as young Black leaders when they went off to high school and so on and so forth.

Natalie shared how teachers constantly look for opportunities to showcase Black accomplishment year-round so students can see excellence in themselves and their community:

Well, for one, the kids see people like themselves, and we emphasize Blackness in the sense that we help them to know who they are so that they can feel good about themselves as Black students growing up. ...And so, every child gets an opportunity to be up front. So, it feels normal for our Franklin kids to be put up front because they do it every so often. ...And so, it gives them a chance to be secure in who they are. And they hear us emphasize Black folks and we don't only do it at Black history time. So being constantly looking for opportunities to show them **Black excellence** as it were, so they can see people like themselves are excelling and can be... use them as role models for themselves.

Christine supported what Natalie said by recounting how her son, a former Franklin student (now adult), never believed in Black inferiority but believed Blacks had an important contributive role in every area of life because of what he was taught at Franklin school.

Well, I go back to my son's experience. He said, mom, I didn't grow up thinking that Blacks couldn't do anything, because at Franklin every day we had to rehearse. I thought that Black people made everything because they had to rehearse who made the street light, who made the ironing board, who made, you know, all the things that, Black people invented, they were inducted into that way of thinking from early. ...So, so when you start off from early, knowing that Black people invented things, by the time you get older and folks started questioning it, you have already formed a bedrock that my people are inventors. And that is something that I think was unique about Franklin that the other schools that were close by did not focus on.

Administrators and educators at Franklin created a culture of racial pride, high expectations, and affirmation that normalized excellence as both a value and standard.

Participants detailed the level of cultural diversity within the school and how teachers elevate this diversity to build students' cultural competence. Alvin stated:

So, I think with the cultural development, I think a lot of times people feel that if you have a child in a school where every student pretty much looks alike, it's not going to develop the cultural piece. However, Franklin was a school that was filled with so many different cultures. We had Africans, we had West Indians, we had African-Americans. And one of the things that we did when I was there, and I'm sure they're still doing is that we celebrated those cultures. We had days where students would represent their country. And, and we had, I remember one year we had like for chapel, you have a different culture come in and bring food and stuff like that. So Franklin, they celebrated it. It wasn't something that you looked at like, okay, your family's of Jamaican descent.

Mine is of Haitian descent. That, that means we can't come together. ...Well, my family was born here in the states. No. People came together and they celebrate that culture.

Christine expounded on the breadth of this diversity within the school by sharing that no less than 20 different countries are represented through students' and faculty backgrounds. She described the value she believed this brought to students' cultural and social development:

If you look at it from an international standpoint, you could have parents on any given day, you have parents from no less than 20 countries in that school. And they are bringing their micro cultural experience within the Black experience to the Franklin community. So yeah, we need, we need to have that, you know expose the kids to different kinds of food, different kinds of traditional ways of doing things, different kinds of drinks, different kinds of accents. You know, and to be able to appreciate people who speak with different accents, because that is one of the area(s) where you have the strongest amount of racism that goes on. You know, people hear your accent, they [form] concepts of what you can and cannot do, and they make decisions about you. So, our kids are exposed to a lot. So they are, they're able to see a teacher who has a Jamaican accent or teacher who has a Haitian accent. And they're able to respect them as a person, as a professional individual, rather than the homogeneous experience that another school would have.

Teachers discuss culture as a part of the curriculum and engage in activities that help to build students' cultural knowledge. Natalie offered her view on why teachers emphasize this cultural learning:

Well, we give them opportunities to engage in activities that are supported by them culturally, and we embrace all cultures. ...As part of our curriculum, we actually cover culture. And so that gives us an opportunity to even broaden our sphere right there. ...Because I feel that the more we get exposed to other cultures and other people, the more we can understand them and that we can appreciate what they have to offer,

because you really cannot live in a box, but we have to mingle and intermingle with others in the world.

Parents shared how racial considerations were a part of their decisions to send their children to Franklin school. They expressed a desire to have their children in a school of good academic quality, but also a school that nurtured and embraced their children's Black identities. In particular, Michael shared:

There's not many schools where you get the opportunity to see where not only are your classmates, the same complexion as you, but the principal, the administration, the board, the chairman of the board are all African-American. That is an experience that is second to none. And not only just doing it, you know, it's just not like a mom and pop, but doing it at a high level. ...I chose to send my children to a Black Seventh-day Adventist school because the Seventh-day Adventist school actually won out. But from, you know, the core of the qualities that.. [were] must have[s], need to have, you know, Franklin, you know, knocked it out of the park on the scores. And so, it is the best Black school for... best school. And it just makes it even better that it's a Black school.

While Michael reflected on his reasons for sending his children to Franklin, Lisa recounted her experience with her children in another school. She shared how the racial challenges they encountered with the school's discipline convinced them to transfer to Franklin:

So, the school was [rated as] one of the top schools in the area. But it did not have any Black male or any...it had one Black female teacher and no Black [male] teachers, no Black. ...And my second son had an incident within three weeks, you know, where they assumed that he did something that he did not do and assumed him guilty. And I attribute that to White female teachers and I will not be, you know, there's no other way for me to say that. And, it lines up with the data that says that our kids are punished more. They're assumed to be deviant, they're assumed to be needing disciplinary actions. And this is my second son who was at Franklin. Never had any incidence ever, is a quieter one of the two. ...So I just, we pulled them out right away

and were willing to lose whatever deposits we had because we don't, it's not worth it. ...But it was just another experience that reaffirms why we brought them to Franklin in the first place.

Paulette and Lisa shared how this bold Black emphasis at Franklin benefited their children.

Paulette noted:

What I appreciate is the very present public embrace of Blackness. ...I appreciate the Black history programs. I appreciate even things like hearing your teacher and your fellow students recite the creed, which is a stated expectation for excellence. ...And the other thing that I appreciate...It's not just African-American Blackness, right? They have Afro Caribbean teachers. They have African friends, they have a Latina teacher. They have a Korean teacher. They have African American teachers. They have. So, but it's not just the African American embrace of Blackness. It is African diaspora embrace of Blackness. They have a Spanish speaking Black teacher who... it's just so cool the depth of Blackness is so cool. I love it.

Lisa believed her children and students at Franklin would benefit from being in an environment where their humanity is embraced instead of attacked:

The amount of self-esteem that's being poured into them because they are Black, not in spite of them being Black. ...For me, it really is, the kids must know that they're human first because the world and this country, which we live in attacks their humanity every day. And my boys are not unaware of that. So they've been on playgrounds where they've been the only Black boys and they see people leave the playground. So they go to [Franklin] school, and nobody's leaving anywhere. They're running to them in fact, when they get to school, people are running to see them, right? ...These kids are growing up with Black lives matter is their context. My kids have been to marches all summer long. That's what we did. So they understand that there's an attack on their humanity. And then they get to go to school where there's an embrace of their humanity. ...And that is important for me because I don't want my kids to internalize Blackness as some kind of negative thing. Some kind of stain that they want to get rid of,

the sort of internalized racism that is really, and I think my husband and I chose Franklin for that purpose, even more but above and beyond the Christian aspects was that this is a Black school and it promotes Blackness and Pan-Africanism.

## Faith

In addition to race, faith plays a prominent role in the education of students at Franklin.

Janet, Miriam, and Alvin described how faith affirmed student beliefs in their own ability to learn. Janet revealed:

It's very prominent because young people learn and are learning that the things that they do is not always based upon them alone, but because of a God who loves them, who they can ask him for help when it comes to their learning. They can ask him for decisions that they have to make. So they learn that it's not just them, but there's someone else a higher power, as some may say it, that provides them with the wisdom that they have and need with the decisions that they have to make and with the things that they, that they do. It's very important. ...It teaches them to lean on God.

Miriam explained that the faith-based perspective teaches students to rely on spiritual power to assist them through academic difficulty:

It's self-image. It's letting the children know you can do it. They're learning the Bible as they're learning everything else. So they know I can do all things. So when you get to this, this math which sometimes seems somewhat difficult for some of the students... but God said, you can do all things through Him. You can do this, you can do this. ...They know they can do all things and when they need help, because that's the way life is. They can get help.

Alvin expressed his belief that faith was a key influence that helped students succeed in school:

And, you know, we definitely can never look past the fact that God was in that school. So I believe that that is just a given between the chapels, and the weeks of prayer

[spiritually-focused school assemblies], and Bible classes, and praying at the beginning of each class that alone I believe, adds to the factor that those students were successful.

Students at Franklin memorize a school creed which they recite daily. This creed merges values of faith with student agency. Maria, Alvin, and Christine shared how this creed reinforces student pride, self-worth, and ability. Maria reflected:

And that's why one of the things that I did a lot was going over the creed line by line, having, helping them memorize it. And not only memorize it, we'd discuss it in class. They knew what it meant, you know, just the thought that they were created in the image of God. And they have been given these special powers that they were meant to succeed. They were meant to do better. So to me, I always started from that perspective from the perspective of God.

Alvin described how the faith-based mission statement of the school was posted in every classroom and that students recited the creed on a daily basis. He asserted that these practices helped instill faith-based values into students that would benefit them throughout life:

So, one of the things that they did at Franklin, they would recite the school creed in the morning. ...But so they would do the creed in the morning. And then if you go, if you notice when you go into every classroom, the mission is posted. And, I bring that up because that really helped to guide the direction of the school from a faith-based standpoint. ...And I think what it allowed them to do was not to just build them up as Black students, but it also built them up as Christians. It also built them up as students who now can understand that, you know, they have God in their corner. And I think that that alone pushes them, you know, they leave Franklin and those values, those Christian values that they, they get there. It takes them a long way.

Christine shared how the recitation of the daily creed not only instilled faith-based values in students but also developed their memorization and speaking abilities. She observed:

But in terms of the speaking part, singing part and the memory, you know just stretching their memory and even with the creed, the creed was written by a grandparent at Franklin school. ...But in addition to them practicing the oral speaking part of it, they were also exposed to, they were also exposed to the moral culture that we wanted with packed into the creed was the moral direction. And, you know, the motivation that the creed provided for the students. So each day, and other schools have their motivational thing that they say a one verse or something. But the creed, I know it's at least five paragraphs long. And those kids typically say that creed every day. So you're setting the bar even from day one when the kids are in pre-K and in kindergarten, and they are hearing this long thing this long recitation when they're young.

Teachers, such as Natalie and Vanessa described how they use faith to heighten students' goals and expectations and employ it as an interpretive lens to understand their world. Natalie shared:

Because they know that they can always rely on Christ, they do their best. And with the support of teachers, parents, and the Lord himself, blessing them and giving them wisdom, according to James 1:5, we see our students developing academically. And also setting for themselves expectations. So students are able to dialogue with their teachers and set goals for themselves, academic goals. So once they set the goal, they're able to reach, we guide them in achieving their goals. And that brings a lot of success and joy to the kids, when we can look at their scores and tell them, look at how much growth they've made over time. So I think it's very important that we encourage them to see where they are, how they can improve and provide the support so that they can be successful.

Teachers integrate faith in their instruction. Vanessa expressed how this integration enables students to have a fuller understanding of human choices and motivations:

Well, I definitely think that as Christians and the way that we teach our classes, the expectation is high for everyone. Like you are God's child, you are important. ...I definitely like everything I teach is through a Christian lens and I know a lot of people might say, I teach, I teach the classics and the classics have all kinds of language, have all kinds of discussions, have all kinds of, but through a Christian, through a Christian lens, everything makes sense. So being able to bring faith into things, gives people a reason for why they do the things that they do. And I think it brings makes things clear for students where in a public school, they may not be able to discuss these things. They may have questions or take it home to their parents. But in a, in our Adventist school, we're able to look at it, everything through the lens of you're a Christian, what is going on behind the scenes.

### Class

Not only are race and faith important in students' experience at Franklin, but their socio-economic class backgrounds are also influential. Students at Franklin come from Black families across the spectrum of lower-class to upper middle-class socio-economic status. This class mix combines in a way that heightens the overall academic program of the school and the experience of its students. Christine explained how social class compositions impact Franklin school:

There are multiple factors in a school like Franklin. One of the factors is where it's located and because it's located in [a metropolitan area] where you have a large number of middle class and upper middle class Black people who are members of the church, and with those members participating in Franklin school, it has brought a higher level of offers to the school. Higher levels in that the teachers are held to a higher standard, and the teachers and the administrators are held to a higher standard. That has its downside. But it takes the school up and with that, it's also in a community where it has to compete with so many other progressive schools. And so that's one of

the, the positive influence for Franklin. Academically, and just being in a setting where you have to stay on the cutting edge. You're not the only game in town and parents are forever ambitious and looking around for the next hotspot. And so, in order to attract and keep those parents, Franklin has always had to stay on the cutting edge.

Families at Franklin from middle-class backgrounds bring their professional, academic, and social capital into the Franklin community. This presence of additional knowledge and resource elevates the entire community. Christine elaborated on this dynamic:

The production from the school is above average. It is way above average of an elementary school. You know, because I think, well, because the students, many of them come from middle or strong middle-class parents, some of them with terminal degrees or definitely advanced graduate degrees. So having that set of parents is going to help. And even the students who don't have that set of parents, rubbing shoulders with other kids with that set of things. So I think it's like the rising tide lifts all the boats.

Janet, Christine, and Miriam outlined three primary areas that Franklin school impacts its students—the areas of college, career, and character. Students at Franklin receive a strong academic foundation that is a gateway to college and career readiness and provides opportunity for social mobility. Christine described the broader Seventh-day Adventist educational system with schools offering preK-postgraduate education and explained how Franklin's students generally track within that system. Finally, Miriam notes that the most important impact of Franklin is that its students emerge with character. Janet discussed Franklin's role in providing students a foundation for college and career readiness:

This school produces students (which a lot of our Seventh-day Adventists schools do) ...who go on into further education (into college). They go [on] to... acquire master's degrees. They acquire doctor's degrees. They become physicians. ...They go to our

Seventh-day Adventist colleges. Even if they go [on] to a [non] Seventh-day Adventist college or university later, they're still able to compete. [They're] able to compete academically.

Christine shared how her son graduated from Franklin and thereafter continued to track within the Black Adventist educational system through college. Black students are able to matriculate within an educational system that equips them for professional careers and social mobility.

Christine explained:

We started the exposure, to high school experience and within the high school experience, we started to build up Oakwood University [a Black Adventist HBCU]. ...So with Franklin school being a part of the Adventist school system, the students are able to move much smoother from one stage to another. Rather than if it was just an independent school. You know, if it was an independent school, when it, when you finish at Franklin you're done, you go wherever. But because your cohorts are moving on to Gateway Adventist Academy or to Pinellas Adventist Academy, you know, that you will have friends and your orientation is not going to be as severe or stark as if you went somewhere where you knew no one. ...It's a package and it's a beautiful package. ...These are average people, but because of the structure of the Adventist system and the Adventist Black educational system. We're able to produce above average professionals. And these are just average people who were given the support. And if we could have that structure more and more Black communities, you know, where Black kids are given this support from preschool on till until university, I think it's a very powerful package.

In addition to laying the groundwork for college and career readiness, Miriam emphasized that Franklin's educational program enabled students to emerge with a strong foundation of character. She explained how Franklin's students understand that the development of their character is a greater outcome than even social class attainments:

Franklin produces children, children with character. ...So that character just catapults them academically. But it catapults them in life with who I am and a responsible citizen, a person who you can trust. You're not out here lying and doing everything I can get away with, no. I'm trying to be successful in life, but success means more than just getting a good job and making a lot of money. And they actually show that they know that.

Franklin school is a distinct convergence of race, class, and faith. These social categories combine within the school in a way that fosters racial pride and agency. A culture of Black excellence is celebrated along with the diverse cultural identities of all students and staff. Parents see Franklin as a place where their children's Blackness is affirmed and a safe space that embraces their humanity. Faith is used by educators at Franklin to instill confidence in students' ability and to provide a framework for them to understand their world. Finally, families from varying socio-economic classes converge at Franklin to create an educational program that supports their children's mobility through college and career readiness, and facilitates the development of their characters.

**"A Space of Opportunity: Social Learning and Social Consciousness"**

Franklin school is a stimulating environment where students are invested with opportunities and experiences that enhance their social learning and consciousness. Participants described how students are given the opportunity to engage with their peers and demonstrate their own gifts and abilities. They are provided with opportunities for leadership development and gain confidence speaking and standing in front of others. Students are given opportunities to share in creating their classroom learning experience through the intentional elevation of their voices by teachers. The classroom instruction they receive gives students an

opportunity to develop social consciousness and awareness of the histories, identities, and contributions of Black people, thereby enabling them to view the world from their own perspective and social location. Teachers provide this knowledge and help students understand their agency to bring about change. Finally, a distinct part of the school culture promotes opportunities for students to engage in service toward their community. Participants painted a detailed picture of Franklin school as a vibrant space of opportunity for its students.

Janet described several academic activities and programs including the annual science fair and spelling bee, school assemblies, and the Christmas and Black history programs that provide important opportunities for students to demonstrate and explore their gifts and abilities:

As I've said, a lot of **opportunities** for them to interact with their peers, those who are older than them, those who are younger than them to interact and the different academic things that they're doing, academic learning, as well as the different programs and things that they do. ...And those interactions I'm talking, I'm thinking about are the academic activities they participate in. Let's say the, the spelling competitions that they have... I'm thinking of the science fair that they have. They have an **opportunity** to participate with not only their own grade level, but with the upper or the lower grades or whatever, as well, not to mention the area there for the assembly, the programs that they do for the assembly, all of that is social, the Christmas programs, Black history program, any other special dates that they make do. ...They may not be given that **opportunity** at another school I'll leave it at that.

In agreement with Janet, Maria and Vanessa illustrated how students at Franklin develop their leadership abilities from K-8<sup>th</sup> grade. Maria articulated:

I think that we create leaders. That is basically the Franklin stamp. You know, starting from like kindergarten, you know, the presentations in the class, they have to go to the front, and present. So they get out of that mentality of shyness and I cannot do it. Memorization, they memorize, expression, how to act out a part and, you know, just feel free to make mistake(s). It's okay. You don't have to be scared because it's something that is part of the process. Next time we will do it better. No problem. We work on it and that builds up the kids. By the time they get to eighth grade, there's no stopping them. They will go to Gateway Academy, like I said before, and take leadership roles.

Vanessa described how teachers instill leadership characteristics within students teaching them how to speak in front of people:

I think that we teach all of our kids to be leaders. Those who aren't necessarily out front people or accustomed to being, you know, I think that from the time they're in kindergarten, putting them in front of someone. Speaking clearly, holding their head up high, not mumbling. Like it's a little hard to do on zoom, but I think that we have ingrained in them. You can do it. And even if they go up there and mess up, you're gonna do it again and you're gonna do it right this time. You know what I'm saying? I think that is one thing Franklin has been good at, from the beginning. ...But I have seen kids be leaders in the classroom.

Natalie shared how she elevates student's voices and experiences in the classroom to maintain engagement and gives them ownership in their learning. She recounted a recent classroom experience:

Not only as a people group, as Blacks, but also individual families, what struggles they may have had, or, you know, what experiences the parents may have. And so this week they're talking about resilience as Black people being resilient. And so the kids are learning too that they too can be resilient, even though they're facing obstacles and

difficulties, because the recent events with Black lives matter and all those, those are very much in the minds of our kids. And so actually the student council was asking if they could put on a chapel to deal with those things. ...My third graders are currently doing that and they're going to find who are the people in their families, what are some of their own struggles as Black people and what are they doing so that they can sustain themselves right now. ...Because we feel that the kids need a voice. And so it is very important that they have the sense that we are listening too because what they say is just as important, if we're trying to train them and to help them to be themselves, to develop as strong individuals. So they get an **opportunity** to share in their learning and their experiences as well. And we find that when they have buy-in, we get better support and we are building stronger students as a result.

Similar to Natalie, Vanessa explained how she encourages students to view the world through their own lens as Black people. She shared how she helps her students understand their agency to impact the world around them and builds their social consciousness:

I kind of, I feel like I've told my kids everything that you face, you need to look at with different lenses. ...I think one of my test questions is always like, okay, how is this going to affect me in the future? What role do I have in impacting the world around me? ...And now being able to say to students, or talk to students about, okay, in this divisive world we're living in right now, where do we stand? What is going to be different about the next four years? What are, how are you, what are you going to do?

Vanessa continued:

...You live here. You don't like that about America. What are we going to do to make it different? ...Why is the fact that Stacey Abrams got all of these Black people to vote? Why is that important? Why, why and why did it take people going from door to door, signing people up? When we broke that down [the recent 2020 Georgia state election] for them, they were like, so we're going to have a tie in the senators? I said, yes, but what happens when there's a tie? Well, the vice-president has to break the tie.

Somebody screamed “and the Vice President is Kamala Harris!” I was like, yes. And why did that happen? Because somebody went door to door. Somebody got up off their feet and did not get mad when she lost. Like, that's you that's me. Right. ...These kids are like "that's us". She went to an HBCU. She went to Howard She went to Spelman. I feel like, I think this pandemic experience has really helped us to see. We are important. We can change things.

Marcus similarly explained how students at Franklin are taught their own histories and perspectives in a manner that is empowering and reinforces their sense of power and ability.

He stated:

Absolutely. there's a lot of history that's not being taught outside of certain institutions. There is not a lot of, you're not being given the perspective and I don't want to get like, too political, just for instance you're going to hear about the civil rights movement, and you're gonna hear about it through a specific lens. ...When they're being taught their history, when they're being taught science, when they were done. I mean, when they're hearing about their Garrett A. Morgans and their Madame CJ Walkers, and all the people that influenced the society that they live in, a lot of places are not telling them that they were the authors, the creators, the builders, the architects of what we see here today. I want them to be able to see themselves as the ones that you have ownership here. You're not just here.

Alvin and Natalie further outlined how students at Franklin are trained to be socially conscious and how this is also facilitated through student service projects within their community. Alvin reflected:

Yeah. So when we talk about social consciousness, I think that's part of what Adventists institutions do. I mean, just every student was required to get a certain number of hours of community service each year. ...We had canned drives every year where kids managed to bring in canned goods. We wanted them to understand that they're blessed

with so much that, you know, there are those out there that did not have. We also did... a coat drive every year as well. ...It was about understanding that there are individuals out there that that may not have as much as you do. There are individuals out there that society is not, is not being kind to, and what can we do to just show our love, show our support and to give back. And that community service piece was a big part of the can drives, the coat drives, the going next door, all of those things added to it.

Natalie encouraged her students to build their social consciousness by getting to know their neighbors. She shared how several students are now helping their neighbors in different ways:

We embrace the, the community. So for my class, I don't think this happens in every class. I encourage the kids to know their neighbors, to their families. ..And so I gave the kids the opportunity to go with their parents and learn three people in their neighborhoods that they were not aware of, so that once they start knowing the people, then they can share their own stories and experiences and know how to, or not to you know, socialize with them. And it was a very good experience with some of the kids. So now I have one kid who is taking out his neighbor's trashcan on the street, back to the house. And another one who sent me a photo last week of her shoveling snow for a neighbor. ...We want service to be natural to them, a part of who they are. So not only are we looking to get, but we're looking to give as well, and not only service to our school, but to our church and communities, many ways.

In many ways, Franklin school is a space of opportunity for students' social learning and social consciousness. Students are given opportunities to demonstrate their gifts, develop their leadership, co-create their learning experiences, understand the world from their own perspective, learn their agency, and engage in changing their world through action and service. These opportunities build students' confidence and consciousness and helps them develop into leaders who are prepared to impact their world.

**“Supporting Teachers and Supporting Students: School Administration and Behavior Management”**

The administrative environment at Franklin is effective because of the support it provides to teachers and students. At its best, Franklin is administered through an interlocking network of school board, principal, and teachers working together to support the needs of students. Participants shared how when school principals provide the right balance of support and accountability for teachers, students are the beneficiaries. Principals, therefore, are sensitive and responsive to the concerns of parents but also careful to not undermine the efforts of teachers. Principals provide mentoring and professional development to help teachers improve their practice. Also, the behavior management approach at Franklin is one that is affirmative and redemptive toward students. Principals and teachers forego punitive management models in preference of positive reinforcement methods that challenge children towards excellence and help develop a school culture of expectation. These outcomes are only realized through the partnering between principals, parents, and teachers to ensure challenging behaviors are addressed and students redeemed. Principals intentionally engage parents and students in genuine relationships that ensure students feel loved, understood, and supported.

Former school principal Miriam discussed the administrative collaboration she experienced with the school board and parents. She explained:

It was the entire staff. And then you have our board. The school board is made up of professionals who, who have something to contribute. Who are knowledgeable and committed and really, really care. ...We had board members who were in public school

and anything the public school was learning, they brought it to us. ...So our board and the parents, the whole community works so well together.

Maria similarly reflected on the benefits of this administrative collaboration and the positive impact on the school program when teachers feel supported. Specifically, she delineated:

Well, I think if the board for once wants to work together with the school, I know I heard that after my departure, that was accomplished somehow that the board worked together more with administration leading the school. And I think that that is keeping those results. Because I know that the teachers expected more students to leave during this pandemic. And it still held strong in some areas because of that, because the school, the board, and administration work together to do that.

Maria described Alvin's leadership as principal as being one that affirmed teachers in their abilities and challenged them to be their best:

And then Mr. Alvin came, it was a total game changer because he came in and he talked to us. ...And through his leadership, he helped me discover. He was the one who convinced me, you know, you can be better. Every day he would come by and say to all the teachers, what are you doing? What, how do you feel today? What's your witness? What should I pray for you for? And it was just like a total game changer. So that motivated us. Okay. I have to do my best. I have to do to just strive, to be better for my class. ...When an administrator comes in and doesn't ...validate our knowledge, our skill, our experience, then it really weakens, the strength of Franklin.

Miriam recounted how as principal she balanced listening to the concerns of parents, while still empowering her teachers. She expressed her efforts to hold teachers accountable by supporting them with mentoring and professional development opportunities:

Any parent who wanted to talk to me about anything they could. However, I would always say, if you're coming to complain about a teacher, go to the teacher first and see

if you can settle whatever that issue is with the teacher. ...I never wanted parents to think to come get me so I can beat up on the teachers. ...We're going to work together, not to beat the teacher down. But to build the teacher up. Maybe there are some techniques that some other students, some other teachers know, maybe there's some workshops. Or maybe there are some things I can work with the teacher.

Miriam described her efforts for teacher accountability as centering children as the priority in education:

Children come first and if the teacher is doing something that's not helping a child, we got to help the child. But teachers for me, teachers come second. ...I'm going to stand up for the teacher. ...I have trust in my teachers so much. I go into the classrooms. I see what they do. I see that their lesson plans are in. Like the time they're in, they're there. And they're supposed to be turning in grades for the kids. I check it.

A key area of insight into Franklin is found in the behavioral management approach principals and teachers use to manage student behavior. Alvin detailed a four-step approach he took as an administrator. He underscored that his approach was an intentional deviation from harsh disciplinary practices that disproportionately punish Black students in other schools.

Alvin reflected:

From an administrative standpoint, we had a couple of things. We have what we call it a four-step process. ...You had to, first of all, give the student a warning, 'Hey, Johnny, I noticed that you're not behaving, I need you back on task'. Second thing they were supposed to do, was to write the child's name on the board. Third thing they were supposed to do was to maybe send their child over to a, a buddy teacher to, for a time out, so to speak. So they can do their work. So they're not disrupting the class. And then that point, if that didn't work, then they go to the principal's office. Several steps were put in place before we even call parents. ...So having a system in place that every teacher used worked.

Alvin described a positive behavioral intervention approach that helped build a school culture where positive student behavior was a norm:

We also use positive behavior intervention at that school, which was also impactful. And that's where there, you know, instead of always pointing out, those students were not doing the right thing. ...I think my point is we tried to do our best to not have.... Black kids are beat up on in society so much. We didn't want to be part of that. ...We wanted to be part of pointing out the good behaviors and helping the other students get in line. ...We built a culture where students wanted to behave and that made a difference.

Alvin described how he and teachers set a culture of expectation that challenged students toward their best. This culture normalized desired behaviors, redeemed students, and reaffirmed them through positive reinforcement. Alvin stated:

If you ever get to visit Franklin, go to Mrs. Natalie's class. She's a [good] teacher, not saying all the other teachers, aren't good, but this is a lady who did not have to raise her voice. She never belittled kids. And I watched how she used those steps and how she rewarded students and how she just had certain expectations. And those students just follow the expectations. ...A lot of times when I worked in public school. Our public school teachers, and this is no disrespect to public school. A lot of times they felt that students were just quote unquote "bad". Per se they, you know, they couldn't get it right. But what I watched, there were students who would come over to Franklin and they may have had issues in the school they came from, but once they got into that culture and they saw... the expectation was to behave a certain way. So that expectation piece, that culture piece was huge.

Alvin experienced how this affirmative approach resulted in students striving for honors, attendance, and other merit awards. He reflected:

You know, you didn't have to discipline kids when the kids wanted to, to behave. And then we also did things like rewarding those behaviors. We had the honor roll, perfect attendance, community service awarded on the end of each quarter to celebrate those students that did the right thing, that worked hard academically.

In line with Alvin's reflections, Miriam also conveyed how the use of positive interventions were more effective in creating a school culture of excellence and incentivizing positive student behavior. She explained how she worked to give students with behavioral offenses opportunities to receive positive affirmation and redeem themselves:

But my approach is rewards, incentives, positives, far outweigh negatives. If you see me as a kid who was on his way to suspension, start doing things where he can earn some positive strokes. Where he can be acknowledged for something good he did. Look for the good, find it and, and nothing succeeds like success. Whether it's in the academics or behavior, once a kid sees himself as a person that people admire, a person who's being rewarded for good citizenship, then they want more of that. ...So that was my... Very, very little demerits, very little notes home to parents. Very little of that because they were always striving to do well for some incentive behavior and academic work.

Franklin school has a remarkably low suspension rate. Both suspensions and expulsions are extremely rare. Principal Miriam highlighted this notable dynamic.

I think we may have had in the two years I was there. We may have had one suspension, but what I said to the parents, if the suspension is for one day, we will not record it in their record. A one day suspension is considered a warning. And I believe we may have had one, one day suspension each year. Last year there were no suspensions. ...And no expulsions. We never had [expulsions]... not at Franklin.

Miriam provided examples of her interactions with parents of students exhibiting challenging behaviors and described how she intentionally set up accountability measures and clear

understandings with these parents. By using this approach, she explains how Franklin school never had any expulsions in her years as principal:

...And so what I've said to parents is that we will accept them on probation. We see that your child has some needs that we can't meet because we don't have the personnel for it. But we believe that what we have is so good, it just might help your child. So we're going to accept your child on probation and we'll have meetings and I'll tell them we're going to meet at this point, we're to meet at this point. And then we'll make a final decision that the child comes off probation. When I have done that, there have been some kids who didn't make it. And so we don't say we're expelling them. We said, we tried the time... the temporary, you know, we let them in on probation, and the parents have always agreed. And I'll be very specific... this is what we saw. This is what we tried to do. This is what I think you need to do. And then once that happens, then let's see, we can try again. We can give them another chance. But we never had an expulsion, not while I was there.

Miriam also discussed how the school handles child behavioral issues that are rooted in the home. She explained:

But if there are problems in the home? It's very, very difficult for the school alone to overcome what the child is was dealing with at home. So, and then we've had times when we've had to, when something has happened the parent has to shadow the child. And we'll have some conferences with the parents. That if your child isn't respecting you, if your child is going to curse you out, we don't have a chance. So what we will try the parent coming in and shadowing. ...Most of the time, there is something going on at home and the parents then begin to see that they've got to do some things too. Adjustments just can't be made at school. They have to make adjustments at home.

In his time as principal, Alvin expressed how he was purposeful in building meaningful relationships with parents and students. This investment gave him an indelible influence on

students' lives because it engendered a culture of caring that brought success to the students and the school and positively impacted student behavior. Alvin recounted:

I understood at the end of the day, parents wanted what was best for their kids. So if they were in my office upset about something, they were in there for a reason. But for the most part, what I noticed as, as principal, the parents were very supportive. ...One of the things that I did, I was standing out front every morning and I would find myself in a group with the fathers, just having conversations, not just, and they weren't complaining about the school. We were just having a conversation as men about things that were going on in our life. ...Or the mothers who would come into the office because, you know, because something that they wanted for their child, they would meet with me and Ms. Natalie or whatever the case may be, but it was always positive interaction. ...And, and there was so many mothers who like the non-working mothers who would come up there and you would see them in the building cause they just wanted to volunteer. ...And so the culture to me, it was just a positive culture.

As an administrator, Alvin believed in building authentic caring relationships with students.

These relationships enabled him to positively influence student behavior. He shared an example of this approach with a former student:

One thing about kids, kids are brutally honest and kids will love on you if they know that you love on them. And this is one of the things that I learned this when I was a vice principal working in Southeast DC and they wrote those kids off. ...One of the worst kids, I'll never forget. ...And you know, he was just this little hardcore kid. And over time I got to know him and he was just a child that needed somebody to tell him that it's okay. People care about you. By the time it was said and done, I can't even put that boy out of school. Because he wanted to be there so much. Kids...want to know that adults care about them...that adults have their best interest in mind. And if they see those two things in you then they will love you all day being their teacher, being their principal. ...You can tell a teacher that doesn't care anymore. He can't build a rapport with h(is)

students, or h(er) students. If those students feel that teacher's out to get them, that's a problem. That's when they need to start rethinking their profession.

Alvin's accessibility and genuine interest in parents and students enabled him to experience positive results in managing student behavior and creating a school environment of care. Alvin detailed:

Because again, kids will give you what you give them. So, my interaction with the students and I would go in the cafeteria and eat lunch with them. I'm going to go on the playground, play basketball, race them from one end of the field, to the other. ...Oh man, we would go skating. I didn't care if I fell. I wanted them to see their principal was human. You know, those types of things. ...I think the fact of the matter... who wants to be in their principal's office? But the kids were just always in here, I say, that's because I had an open-door policy to the parents and the students and I listened to them. A whole group of students were coming in during their recess, I'm like, "this is recess y'all want to be in the office?" Yeh, we want to fix this problem because they knew I would listen to them. ...I think that's my favorite part of the job. Because again, at the end of the day, I wanted to treat my, every student no different than I treated my own kids. And that was my mindset. ...And that's why I believe any good principal. It's not about sitting in your office. It's not about leading by writing emails to your teachers all day. It comes down to kids. And if you're there for the students and you have the students' best interests at heart, the school is going to be successful, the kids are going to love you for it.

The reflections of participants provided detailed insights into the administrative operation and behavioral management approach of Franklin school. They described Franklin at its best when teachers are both supported and held accountable to a high standard of professional practice. When school board, principal, and teachers work collaboratively, it leads to successful outcomes with students. Principals and teachers use positive intervention

strategies to redeem students and create a culture of expectation and excellence that effectively manages student behavior and challenges students to exhibit their best. The impact of this approach is seen in the school's exceptionally low suspension and expulsion rate. Parent-teacher partnerships are intentionally formed to ensure student success and administrators build meaningful relationships with students and their families that engender care and trust. These reflections portrayed Franklin school as an environment of authentic relationships and genuine support.

In summary, the research findings reveal that six primary factors influence the academic, social, and cultural development of Black students attending Franklin school. Among these are the establishment of Franklin school as an affirming and safe space for Black students; the strong social networks between home, school, and church; the missional pedagogy and practice of high-quality teachers providing high quality instruction; the emphasis on racial pride, faith, and achievement or "Black excellence" that bolsters students' self-concept and confidence in their academic abilities; school opportunities that enhance students' leadership, social learning, and social consciousness; and administrative and behavioral management practices that support students and teachers. These six factors influence the academic, social, and cultural development of Franklin's students and comprise the core qualitative elements observed within Franklin school.

**RQ2- Liberation at Franklin School: *To what extent, if any, do these academic, social, and cultural factors facilitate the liberation of Black students?***

This study looked at the critical pedagogy concept of liberation in the context of the American educational system. In this research, liberation is defined as “emancipation from oppression in its social, economic, political, cultural, and ideological forms especially as it relates to racism and white supremacy” (Cone, 2003; Freire, 1970; Hopkins, 2004; also see Ch. 3). The concept of liberation in this study is empirically constructed and identified by the presence of six core elements found within the literature: empowering, succeeding, strengthening, affirming, building consciousness, critical thinking-deconstructive analysis-creativity (see Fig. 3). This study also empirically defines nine domains of liberation which reflect observable areas in the development of students: confidence and self-actualization, positive self-concept, cultural awareness, resilience, academic ability, critical thinking, socio-political consciousness, spiritual consciousness, and leadership development (See Fig 4). The data in this study reveal all six elements of liberation are present in Franklin school and are impacting students at Franklin in these nine domains.

***Liberation and Missional Pedagogy***

***(Empowering/Strengthening/Affirming/Critical thinking)***

**Domains: confidence and self-actualization, positive self-concept, cultural awareness, resilience, academic ability, critical thinking**

Through the missional pedagogy of its teachers, Franklin school is both empowering and strengthening the advancement and development of its students. This missional pedagogy is centered on the needs of the student, features high-commitment, high-investment, high-

expectations, is culturally responsive, and promotes critical thinking. These features of teachers' pedagogy encompass several elements and domains of liberation. Maria, Vanessa, and Alvin described how this missional pedagogy empowered and strengthened students.

Maria stated:

My pedagogy was always, the student is the most important. Not curriculum, not extracurricular activities. You know, the student is who guides the curriculum. ...[But] when you put the students first and you teach to the students' strengths and weaknesses and you let them guide a curriculum. That's what you get at the end. The students do not forget. They keep building on what you already taught them.

Through intense dedication, teachers empowered students to be their best. Alvin reflected on this effort:

I think that the key that separates Franklin from all the schools is the teacher's dedication. The teachers intrinsically want the students to do well. Very rarely you'll hear a teacher trying to do the least for their student. They always want to do the most.

Similar to Alvin, Vanessa attested to teachers' affirming impact that strengthened students to be successful academically. She expounded:

I think having teachers that are genuinely interested in your future academic success, as well as your entire life, all around you, spirituality, your mental, everything, they genuinely are invested in whether or not you make it. ...And they're not going to give up on you. That is something that you definitely don't see in a lot of other schools for different reasons. But I definitely think that that is, that contributes to academic success at Franklin.

Vanessa shared how the approach of Black teachers is culturally responsive for Black students and helps build their confidence. Teacher efforts are affirming and prepare students for their future. She asserted:

I think that Black teachers in very specific ways, we make a concerted effort to prepare students for what's going to be in the future. I don't see that in other schools. I think that that helps build the Black student up helps build their confidence because they're prepared for whatever's coming.

Maria and Natalie shared how they promoted critical thinking in the classroom. For example, Maria shared how she used educational videos to teach her kindergartners critical thinking skills:

So, they have to pay attention. They have to critically think of all the different clues that the video gave. And they have to arrive to a conclusion according to the ending. And that is just, I remember that it helped them so much that whenever they would pick up a book, it was like so easy for them to make the transition. They just pick up clues from the pictures, pick up clues from, from different words. And then they were able to tell me what the story was about with no stop. They were just so fast at getting that main point. So for me, that helped them to think critically more instead of me giving them the answers all the time.

Natalie shared a critical thinking exercise she uses in her classroom:

...And you're challenging them by using argument that's reasonable, that's logical, and that is factual. So that is something that we do generally in our school and specifically in my, my class. And the kids love to challenge. They even challenge me. And I like that. ...Because it tells me that they're not just, you know, waiting for me to point to them, but they want to see a different perspective. ...And that's how I teach them.

The missional pedagogy of teachers at Franklin is a pedagogy of liberation. It empowers and strengthens students by investing in them, affirms and builds their confidence, supports their academic success, is culturally responsive, and teaches them to be independent and critical thinkers. Through these efforts, teachers positively impact students in the domains of

confidence and self-actualization, positive self-concept, cultural awareness, resilience, academic ability, and critical thinking.

***Liberation and the Village  
(Strengthening)***

**Domain: Confidence and self-actualization**

The strong social networks of school, home, and church at Franklin create a village that strengthens the total development of Franklin's students. Christine reflected on the impact of this village:

I need a village to raise my child because I didn't have relatives here in the area. And if I'm going to raise him, I can't do it by myself as a single parent. So, I have the church. I was secure and I said, okay, I'm putting him in the school. This is going to be our village and we're just going to stick with it. And it worked out because the church reinforced the school, the school reinforced the home, and the triangle was tight. ...Yeah. The triangle was tight and it worked for him and most of the kids in his class. Not just him, but most of the kids in his class.

This village helps strengthen the social and emotional development of students by ensuring they have a strong communal support system. Within this village, students receive opportunities to develop their confidence and self-actualize by exploring their interests and abilities in numerous social activities. Marcus noted:

And I think that that plays a key role in, in the success of the students also because it is such a close-knit community. Oftentimes the families that enroll their children in these institutions or in this institution in particular are part of the church community on the weekend, the school community during the week. There are, it, it becomes an extended family, so to speak, it's it reaches beyond the eight-hour school day, six-hour school day. ...Social is very big because as I was stating, the young people in the classes are not

seeing each other, just five or six hours a day. They're in the extracurriculars. Then they're in their church seeing together they're in their Pathfinders together, they're in their AYS [Adventist Youth Society] together. They're in their church basketball team together and their school basketball team, the dance team. I mean, it's literally, they're together more than they're not, but it is essentially an extended family.

The Franklin village of school, home, and church forms a safe and nurturing habitus for Franklin's students. This protective environment strengthens and builds up Black students in a manner that is mutually reinforcing and liberating. Such efforts build student confidence and help them develop toward their full potential.

### ***Liberation and Test scores***

#### ***(Succeeding)***

**Domain: academic ability**

Franklin achievement data reveals that Franklin students are performing at a high academic rate relative to their peers. Specifically, students are outperforming their public and private school peers both nationally and within their state (Tables 12-15). Franklin school is facilitating strong achievement and academic success for its students in a manner that starkly contrasts from its public and private school counterparts nationally and within the state. In this sense, Franklin school is liberating its students to effectively compete and advance educationally.

### ***Liberation through Black excellence and Mobility***

#### ***(Empowering/Succeeding/Affirming/ Building Consciousness)***

**Domains: confidence and self-actualization, positive self-concept, cultural awareness, resilience**

The emphasis on racial pride and achievement or "Black excellence" at Franklin school contain several elements and domains of liberation. Franklin school builds confidence,

consciousness, and cultural awareness in a manner that is affirming and liberating for Black students and makes them resilient. Additionally, by effectively preparing students for college and career readiness, the school is impacting the social mobility of its students and heightening their academic and economic trajectories. These outcomes and opportunities embody the school's liberatory impact.

Several participants attested to the confidence, consciousness, and cultural awareness promoted by Franklin school. For example, Maria shared, "I think it gives them a sense of pride and a sense of identity." Moreover, Alvin explained that Franklin grounded students in racial pride and cultural awareness:

Franklin was founded on that with that culture in mind, build a place for our students to be better. ...We exposed them, not just to what the, what was out there, but we allowed people to be exposed to them, to see the culture of what Black excellence looked like. ...So yeah, I think it was a, it was a culture. If I had to put a stamp on it, I think it was a culture of pride, a culture of Black excellence, a culture of success.

Paulette reflected on how Franklin instilled high expectations within students which affirmed them and groomed them for success:

What I appreciate is the very present public embrace of Blackness. ...I appreciate the Black history programs. I appreciate even things like hearing your teacher and your fellow students recite the creed, which is a stated expectation for excellence. You know, I, there are overt and covert ways that the school embraces Blackness, that I appreciate. ...It embraces the Blackness as you are created in God's image. And the expectation is high for you.

Janet noted the opportunities for social mobility that Franklin provides by preparing students for college and career readiness:

This school produces students (which a lot of our Seventh-day Adventists schools do) ...who go on into further education (into college). They go [on] to... acquire master's degrees. They acquire doctor's degrees. They become physicians. ...They go to our Seventh-day Adventist colleges. Even if they go [on] to a [non] Seventh-day Adventist college or university later, they're still able to compete. [They're] able to compete academically.

Through its affirmation of Black excellence, Franklin school builds the confidence, consciousness, and cultural awareness of its students. Also, by supporting academic success, Franklin ensures its students have a foundation for college and career readiness and are afforded opportunities for social mobility. When taken together, these elements have liberatory impact.

***Liberation through Leadership development and Social consciousness  
(Building Consciousness)***

**Domains: Socio-political consciousness, leadership development**

Students at Franklin school are also impacted in several domains of liberation. They are trained to be leaders and to understand their ability to impact their world. Maria recounted how this leadership development begins when students are in kindergarten and continues through the eighth grade:

I think that we create leaders. That is basically the Franklin stamp. You know, starting from like kindergarten, you know, the presentations in the class, they have to go to the front, and present. So they get out of that mentality of shyness and I cannot do it. ...We work on it and that builds up the kids. By the time they get to eighth grade, there's no stopping them. They will go to Gateway Academy, like I said before, and take leadership roles.

While Maria explained how teachers nurture students' leadership abilities, Vanessa described how she worked to build students' social consciousness. She stated:

I kind of, I feel like I've told my kids everything that you face, you need to look at with different lenses. Like nothing's ever just as it is, like, what, how is this going to... I think one of my test questions is always like, okay, how is this going to affect me in the future? What role do I have in impacting the world around me? ...And now being able to say to students, or talk to students about, okay, in this divisive world we're living in right now, where do we stand? What is going to be different about the next four years? What are, how are you, what are you going to do? ...You live here. You don't like that about America. What are we going to do to make it different? ...We are important. We can change things.

Natalie further outlined how students at Franklin are trained to be socially conscious and how this is facilitated through student service projects within their community:

Students are expected from pre-K all the way to eighth grade. They have a certain number of hours that they're required to cover each year. And so sometimes we give them community service thru the school. ...We want service to be natural to them, a part of who they are. So not only are we looking to get, but we're looking to give as well, and not only service to our school, but to our church and communities, many ways.

Students' social consciousness was also demonstrated in a recent school assembly where they shared their perspectives on current events. This assembly was video recorded by school staff. Educators at Franklin made this video available for this study. The video provides rich insights into student attitudes and perspectives and reveals the breadth of their socio-political consciousness.

### *School Social Justice Assembly Video*

Students at Franklin school recently led out in a week-long school assembly to discuss social justice concerns that were on their minds. Natalie, a teacher at Franklin, shared how her students wanted to put on a program to deal with issues of justice that were impacting their community (pp. 139-140). Natalie explained that she engaged this conversation with the students to elevate and incorporate their voices into the learning experience. A school-wide social justice assembly was the outgrowth of this request and featured students from grades K through eight expressing their views on racial justice concerns. The week-long daily assemblies were captured on video by teachers. At the final assembly, teachers and students constructed a video montage of student reflections on the themes of social justice, prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes, and microaggressions. The following is a description of this final school assembly video.

The video montage opens with a collage of pictures from recent racial justice protests across the nation. As these images are flashed, the song “Call to Action” by gospel group Anthony Brown and Group Therapy<sup>10</sup> is played. “Call to Action” was written and released in 2020 and outlines the responsibility of the current generation to stand up against today’s racial injustice to bring social change. The lyrics recount the historical freedom struggle of Black people and ends with a calling of the names of the many who lost their lives to police violence. “Call to Action” was played at the opening of each daily assembly during this week of social justice emphasis. The video montage then displays fifth grade student responses to the

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix J for lyrics to Anthony Brown’s “Call to Action”

question, “What is social justice? Do Black Lives Matter? Does my life matter?” The following are a few of these fifth grader responses:

“It means that all lives matter and we should respect people for who they are.”

“To me, it means that everyone should get equal rights and if anyone doesn’t, they should fight for what’s right.”

“I would like the world to realize that Blacks have been fighting for centuries and that every life matters, especially Black lives.”

“I would like to say that all people should be equal and we should stand up for our rights.”

Along with these statements, students drew pictures that included slogans “Equality and Justice for all” and “No Justice, No Peace”. Students also shared their class discussions on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. One student described the negative stereotyping and violence against Asians in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Another student described discrimination as prejudice being acted upon.

Within the video montage, artwork from kindergarten students at Franklin was highlighted which featured students’ drawn images of hands and hearts to express their belief in love for all humanity. One third grader penned the following poem:

“Everybody is the same. Quantity will never matter. We are all united together. We are all together as one. Love is all around everything and everyone. Include everything and everyone. We’re all together forever. We all matter.”

Another third grader wrote the following words:

“But Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, these are Black people who did GREAT THINGS, and YOU can do Great Things if you put your mind to it. I have a Voice, you have a voice, Everyone has a voice, a BIG voice, so use that voice for the better”

Students in the upper grades learned about microaggressions and created pictures to describe microaggressions they have seen or experienced. Five students provided examples of their experiences with microaggressions:

“I’ve been asked, Is that your natural hair?”

“What are you?”

“You seem more American than Black”

“You don’t talk like a normal Hispanic boy”

“Stop touching my hair”

Also included in the video montage were reflections from first graders on why they believed Black lives matter. First graders created placards with messages expressing why Black lives mattered to them. One first grader provided the following response:

“I put Black lives matter because my dad is Black, my mom is Black, my sister is Black, my dog is Black. Even my grandma and grandpa are Black—even my cousins.”

Fourth grade students created a play on the themes of injustice, racism, and stereotypes.

These fourth graders explained that stereotypes are putting people in a box because of characteristics or behaviors.

The video montage from this social justice assembly demonstrated that students were keenly aware of the issues of injustice that were occurring in their community and had very personal opinions and experiences with them. This week of social justice emphasis is an example of how teachers and students at Franklin develop and embed social consciousness and social responsibility within the learning experience.

In conclusion, the data reflects that Franklin school is liberating Black students in a myriad of ways. The missional pedagogy of teachers empowers and strengthens students by affirming their ability to learn and training them to become independent and critical thinkers. The strong social network or “village” of school, church, and home serves to protect Black students and strengthen their total development and advancement. Franklin’s test scores demonstrate that students are achieving at high rates relative to their peers in public and private schools and are gaining the skills and knowledge to successfully compete in the world. The school’s emphasis on Black excellence ensures that students develop confidence, consciousness, and cultural awareness while also providing opportunity for social mobility through college and career readiness. And teachers train students to become leaders who are socially conscious and exercise their power to change their world. The data reveals that all six elements of liberation are present within the nine domains at Franklin school.

**RQ3- Resistance at Franklin School: To what extent, if any, are elements of resistance occurring within this school?**

The critical pedagogy concept of resistance was also explored in this study. In this research, resistance is defined as “the exertion of oppositional force against established ideology, knowledge, or power” (Apple, 2008; Giroux, 1983; see also Ch. 3). Resistance is an action carried out by actors. Within educational contexts, these actors are teachers, administrators, parents, and students. This study defined resistance as actions expressed by these actors in six ways: challenging hegemonic frameworks, ideologies, and pedagogies of racial exclusion;

embracing social consciousness and critique; establishing affirming learning environments as a counter to racially hostile educational contexts; ensuring cultural relevance and inclusion in education vs. cultural homogeneity and exclusion; investing time and resources into Black students to counter social trends of disinvestment; and resisting educational mediocrity or failure through high expectations and standards of excellence (see Fig 5).

This study also identified 12 observable categories or domains as informed by the literature wherein actions of resistance may be expressed: behavior management approach, staff composition, teacher quality, parent partnerships, engagement with students, organizational culture, pedagogy and practice, teacher attitudes and engagement, motivations for enrolling child at school, parent engagement/involvement and participation, student motivation, student attitude (see Fig. 6). The data in this study reveal all six elements of resistance are present in Franklin school and are observed within these twelve domains.

### ***Resistance and the Need for Black Space***

***(Establishing affirming learning environments as a counter to racially hostile educational contexts)***

**Domains: Motivations for enrolling child at school, organizational culture**

Participants shared how Franklin school was established as a result of racial exclusion at the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist schools in the area. By contrast, Franklin school was a place where Black students could be seen for who they are, given opportunity, and recognized for their abilities. The story of Franklin school is one of resistance to racially disaffirming schools and the establishing of an affirming school for Black children. Alvin recounted:

So a group of parents came together from Greater Hope SDA church and Central City SDA church [pseudonyms] at the time and they said they wanted to start their own school and they did. ..So that school was founded literally as a place for African-American students, students of African descent to go and be treated fairly to be treated a certain way to be treated with dignity and respect. And that again was the foundation or the impetus for that school being started.

As superintendent at the time, Miriam described the concerns she received from parents that led her to begin planning for a new school:

And I knew there was a need for it because parents from these other schools in other conferences were calling me to ask, what could I do about some injustice at the school where their child was going? ...I got several of these calls, of course. And then that's when I started dreaming about the we need a school in the North, we need a school. And the dream started materializing into some plans.

The creation of Franklin school represented an act of resistance by parents, educators, and church leaders within the Black Adventist community against racially unjust and insensitive educational contexts. Franklin was organized to serve as an affirming school for Black students.

### ***Resistance and the Village***

***(Investing time and resources into Black students to counter trends of disinvestment)***

**Domains: parent partnerships, teacher attitudes and engagement, parent involvement**

At Franklin, parents partner with teachers and their church community to create durable bands of support and investment for their children. Parents, teachers, and Black fathers, in particular, invest their time and resource into students at Franklin in a manner that contrasted with broader social trends. This investment is consistent, intentional, and normative within the Franklin community. Marcus offered his views on this matter:

The ability to have parental involvement whether it be through the home and school association or the relationship that the teachers have, or the parents have with the teachers... that also plays a key role. I'm a believer that no matter how smart a child is, they will generally not be successful without parental influence. So anytime you see a parent 100% involved and, and keyed in on the education of their child, the child is successful. So, that's also, and that's a welcome environment, at Franklin. So, we're not pushing the parents away... it is a partnership. And I believe that partnership fosters a lot of success.

Lisa recognized the investments teachers were making into her children and decided to make similar investments through her own involvement in the school. She declared:

And for me, one of the main reasons why I get involved when my kids are at a new space, in a new space is because I want the teachers to know me. I want the teachers to know me, and I want them to know that I am their partner and not their critic. ...And especially because they have shown, these teachers have shown me that they are trustworthy and that they want the absolute best for my kids. So, because of that, I'm involved for their sake.

A particular dynamic noted was the involvement of Black men in the school. Lisa described a robust investment and engagement of Black fathers at Franklin school:

My husband has found so much comradery in the school because he can be his fully Black involved self because he sees other men doing the same thing. And to the point where if there is a child whose father is not available that day, we've seen parents step in. ...Come spend a day at our school and the fathers are there in the morning. They're there throughout the day. They're there for science fair. They're there teaching kids sports, like Michael said, you know, they're just everywhere. Black men are everywhere. ...And the positive reinforcement that our kids feel from Black men, that's really important.

These were descriptions of a school environment where parents, teachers, and Black men invested their time and resource into students. They were examples of how the Franklin community resisted broader patterns of disinvestment of Black students.

***Resistance and the Educator***

***(Challenging hegemonic frameworks, ideologies, and pedagogies of racial exclusion/ resisting educational mediocrity or failure through high expectations and standards of excellence)***

**Domains: pedagogy and practice, teacher attitudes and engagement, teacher quality**

The pedagogy, practice, attitudes, and expectations of teachers at Franklin challenged racially exclusive frameworks and educational approaches the literature describes as being harmful to Black students. Instead of unconscious bias and low expectations, teachers had high-commitment, high-investment, and high-expectations that resisted educational mediocrity amongst their students. They were also culturally responsive in a manner that resisted pedagogies of racial exclusion. For example, Maria shared:

And at Franklin I noticed that the strength is in the teachers, the teachers care about their students individually. ...It's always like 24-7, you're committed to the success of the kids. And you do anything to make sure that they grasp the concept, that they know how to do the work and to push them to do to their maximum abilities. Instead of saying, Oh, that's a C that's good. At Franklin, at least the teachers that were there when I was there always had that mentality that they saw the student's potential. They never left it at the middle or lower. You always have to be the best.

Alvin described an investment and expectation that teachers had that was geared toward ensuring the success of all students. He asserted:

I think that the key that separates Franklin from all the schools is the teacher's dedication. The teachers intrinsically want the students to do well. Very rarely you'll

hear a teacher trying to do the least for their student. They always want to do the most. ...The way I watched them, make sure they were successful. They could be very hard as a parent they were hard on my kids, but they were hard on them in love because their expectations were a lot higher.

Natalie and Vanessa shared their cultural responsiveness in the classroom. Natalie, in particular, explained, "So I become sensitive to the cultural norms for other cultures and integrate that with my teaching."

Vanessa explained how Black teachers engage Black students in an effort to build their confidence and prepare them for their social reality:

I think that Black teachers in very specific ways, we make a concerted effort to prepare students for what's going to be in the future. I don't see that in other schools. I think that that helps build the Black student up helps build their confidence because they're prepared for whatever's coming.

Teachers at Franklin provide a level of investment and expectation that resists patterns of educational mediocrity and failure for Black students. They resist pedagogies of racial exclusion by integrating students' culture into their teaching to ensure they teach to their students' perspectives.

***Resistance through Black Excellence and Mobility***

***(Ensuring cultural relevance and inclusion in education vs. cultural homogeny and exclusion/ establishing affirming learning environments as a counter to racially hostile educational contexts/ resisting educational mediocrity or failure through high expectations and standards of excellence)***

**Domains: motivations for enrolling child at school, organizational culture**

The culture of Franklin emphasizes excellence and high achievement for Black students or what Franklin educators termed "Black excellence". Parents shared that this culture was a

part of the reason why they sent their children to Franklin and contrasted with what some had experienced in other schools. Their choice of Franklin represented an act of resistance against low achieving, punitive schools that excluded the culture of Black students. They described how Franklin's culture of excellence facilitated students' academic success providing the foundation for college and career readiness and social mobility. Their school choice was their means of resisting educational contexts that limited their children's potential and instead putting them in an affirming space that maximized their opportunity and future mobility. Alvin described the school culture:

It was a culture. If I had to put a stamp on it, I think it was a culture of pride, a culture of Black excellence, a culture of success. And I think it was something that was built over time and I think it was intentional. But ultimately it wasn't me as principal, that's the culture that, and again, I want to be clear that was the culture that the school was founded on.

Michael discussed his reasons for sending his child to Franklin school:

I chose to send my children to a Black Seventh-day Adventist school because the Seventh-day Adventist school actually won out. But from, you know, the core of the qualities that we had for... that [were] must have[s], need to have ...Franklin, you know, knocked it out of the park on the scores. And so, it is the best Black school ... the best school. And it just makes it even better that it's a Black school.

Lisa recounted her experience with her children in another school and how racial challenges they encountered there convinced them to transfer to Franklin:

My second son had an incident within three weeks, you know, where they assumed that he did something that he did not do and assumed him guilty. And I attribute that to White female teachers and...there's no other way for me to say that. And, it lines up

with the data that says that our kids are punished more. They're assumed to be deviant, they're assumed to be needing disciplinary actions. And this is my second son... Never had any incidents ever, is a quieter one of the two. ...So, we pulled them out right away and were willing to lose whatever deposits we had because, it's not worth it. ...But it was just another experience that reaffirms why we brought them to Franklin in the first place.

Paulette discussed her value of Franklin's culture within the current Black civil rights social movement:

What I appreciate is that the school is a safe place for them to be Black and explore their Blackness within the context of the 2021 civil rights up 20 and 21 civil rights, the new civil rights era. Right. It's not just that they are, they're not reading it in a book. They're living it and they're able to live it and express it and work through it in the safety of a Christian Black environment with teachers who explain it from a historic teacher, Black Christian environment. I appreciate that if never before.

Janet explained how Franklin school provides the foundation for college and career readiness and future mobility:

This school produces students (which a lot of our Seventh-day Adventists schools do) ...who go on into further education (into college). ...They acquire master's degrees. They acquire doctor's degrees. They become physicians. They become dentists. I mean, you name whatever profession you want to name. ...They go to our Seventh-day Adventist colleges. Even if they go to a...[non] Seventh-day Adventist college or university later, they're still able to compete, be able to compete academically.

By enrolling their children at Franklin, parents exercised strategies to place their children in a high achieving Black environment that would maximize their opportunity and potential while affirming their identity. They actively resisted schools that harmed their children in preference

for a school they believed improved their children’s self-concept and academic abilities while supporting their opportunity.

***Resistance and Social Consciousness***  
***(embracing social consciousness and critique)***

**Domains: pedagogy and practice, student motivation, student attitude**

Teachers at Franklin help develop students’ social consciousness by teaching them how to critique and change their world. They teach resilience and engagement as actions of resistance to a hostile social environment. Natalie shared:

So, this week they're talking about resilience as Black people being resilient. And so the kids are learning too that they too can be resilient, even though they're facing obstacles and difficulties, because the recent events with Black lives matter and all those, those are very much in the minds of our kids. ...They are aware of who they are, what they want, what is right, what is wrong for Blacks like themselves living in a country like this.

Vanessa challenged students to use their learning to understand their world and their role and power change it. She explained:

One of my test questions is always like, okay, how is this going to affect me in the future? What role do I have in impacting the world around me? ...And now being able to say to students, or talk to students about, okay, in this divisive world we're living in right now, where do we stand? What is going to be different about the next four years? What are, how are you, what are you going to do? ...We are important. We can change things.

In a recent school assembly on social justice, fifth graders at Franklin created a video montage capturing their responses to the question, “What is social justice? Do Black Lives Matter? Does my life matter?” The following are a few of these fifth grader responses:

“It means that all lives matter and we should respect people for who they are.”

“To me it means that everyone should get equal rights and if anyone doesn’t, they should fight for what’s right.”

“I would like the world to realize that Blacks have been fighting for centuries and that every life matters, especially Black lives.”

“I would like to say that all people should be equal and we should stand up for our rights.”

Along with these statements, students drew pictures that included slogans “Equality and Justice for all” and “No Justice, No Peace”. Students also shared their class discussions on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. One student described the negative stereotyping and violence against Asians in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. One third grader penned the following poem:

“Everybody is the same. Quantity will never matter. We are all united together. We are all together as one. Love is all around everything and everyone. Include everything and everyone. We’re all together forever. We all matter.”

Another third grader wrote the following words:

“But Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, these are Black people who did GREAT THINGS, and YOU can do Great Things if you put your mind to it. I have a Voice, you have a voice, Everyone has a voice, a BIG voice, so use that voice for the better”

Teachers at Franklin help students exercise their voice and understand their power to impact their world. They teach them resilience and encourage social consciousness and critique which are core characteristics of resistance. Students’ responses captured their levels of social consciousness, attitudes and motivations, and beliefs in their ability to change their world.

### ***Resistance and School Administration***

***(Establishing affirming learning environments as a counter to racially hostile educational contexts)***

**Domains: behavior management approach, staff composition, engagement with students**

The administration of Franklin school features elements of resistance that counter harmful patterns negatively impacting Black students in other schools. Schools without diverse staff compositions leave students of color vulnerable to teacher bias (Moore, 2017; Oates, 2003). Also, school discipline is disproportionately exercised against children of color (Lustick, 2017; Quimby, 2021; Schiff, 2018). Administrators at Franklin resist these harmful outcomes by employing a diverse teaching staff and enacting affirming behavior management strategies.

Marcus and Alvin described these efforts. Marcus noted:

The staff is primarily people of color, not all of Black. We have Asian staff, we have White staff. We have I think it's, it's fairly diverse. And I think that's to our benefit because the children get a lot of their instruction again from Black instructors. But they're also not blind to the fact that we're not the only ones here. You also need to have the full perspective.

In addition to diverse staff, Alvin described the behavior management approach at Franklin. He explained that this approach was guided by a desire to resist processes of over-penalization against Black students:

We also had we also use positive behavior intervention at that school, which was also impactful. And that's where there, you know, instead of always pointing out, those students [who] were not doing the right thing. ...I think my point is we tried to do our best to not have.... Black kids are beat up on in society so much. We didn't want to be part of that.

Alvin described how he and teachers set a culture of expectation that challenged students toward their best. This culture normalized desired behaviors, redeemed students, and reaffirmed them through positive reinforcement. Alvin remarked:

We wanted to be part of pointing out the good behaviors and helping the other students get in line. Even when they got sent to the principal's office. We wanted to be able to say...we want to give you the optimal opportunity to change your behaviors and get it right. So you don't have to go to the principal. But I think that positive reinforcement, the having steps in place, I think that went a long way. And I think, again, going back to the last question, we built a culture where students wanted to behave and that made a difference.

Alvin also discussed how he engaged with students to build relationship and engender a culture of caring. This relational culture effectively managed behavior and minimized negative behavioral incidents. He recounted:

So my interaction with the students and I would go in the cafeteria and eat lunch with them. I'm going to go on the playground, play basketball, race them from one end of the field, to the other. ...Oh man, we would go skating. I didn't care if I fell. I wanted them to see their principal was human. ...I had an open door policy to the parents and the students and I listened to them. The kids would come in there [principal's office], they would come in there with petitions and say, Mr. Alvin, we're having this issue in our classroom, can we... we want to sit and talk? ...And you know, I remember just going back to standing out front of the school, kids coming in, they were stopping, hugging me, and I'll be honest between you and I, I'm not a hugger at all. ...They would just run over to me. And it was just that yeah, I think that's my favorite part of the job. ...If you're there for the students and you have the students' best interests at heart, the school is going to be successful, the kids are going to love you for it.

Teachers and administrators at Franklin school create a culture of expectation through positive reinforcement thereby minimizing undesirable student behavior. By employing a diverse staff, creating a caring environment, and engaging positive behavior management strategies, Franklin's administrators and teachers resisted punitive approaches and culturally insensitive staff compositions that harm Black students.

***Resistance and Test scores***

***(Resisting educational mediocrity or failure through high expectations and standards of excellence)***

**Domains: pedagogy and practice, student motivation**

As displayed in tables 4-11, students at Franklin are outperforming their peers in public and private schools nationwide across an array of measures. These results are achieved with intention because teachers stretch students toward their height. Maria explained this effort.

You do anything to make sure that they grasp the concept, that they know how to do the work and to push them to do to their maximum abilities. Instead of saying, Oh, that's a C that's good. At Franklin, at least the teachers that were there when I was there always had that mentality that they saw the student's potential. They never left it at the middle or lower. You always have to be the best.

Educators at Franklin resist educational mediocrity and help students to reach the height of their ability. Under such instruction, students are motivated to do their best and excel. The evidence that this resistance is effective is seen in Franklin students' high achievement scores.

### ***Resistance and School History***

***(Establishing affirming learning environments as a counter to racially hostile educational contexts)***

**Domains: motivations for enrolling child at school, parent engagement, organizational culture**

Included on Franklin’s website is the school history<sup>11</sup>. Franklin’s origins began through the collaboration of members from Greater Hope SDA and Central City SDA churches over thirty years ago. The intent was to establish a school that “would be sensitive and responsive to the uniqueness of Black students in particular, and diversity minded families”<sup>12</sup>. The collective resourcing and organization by these two Black churches enabled the school to open its doors in the late 1980s on the campus of Central City SDA church. The need for the school was immediately demonstrated as enrollment doubled in its second year of existence necessitating the construction of a new facility. Three decades later Franklin continues to serve the educational needs of Black and Brown students within the local community and the broader church constituency. Franklin school is named after a pioneering Afro-Caribbean Seventh-day Adventist pastor within the denomination. Pastor Franklin focused much of his ministry on building up Black urban areas and was an early leader on racial justice issues within the denomination.

The history of Franklin is grounded in the resistance efforts of parents, educators, and church leaders to create a safe and empowering environment for Black students.

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix G for Franklin’s school history

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

***Resistance- Tuition and Affordability***

***(Investing time and resources into Black students to counter social trends of disinvestment)***

**Domains: organizational culture**

The school website also provides information on tuition costs at Franklin school. Standard tuition at Franklin school starts at \$8,400 per year per child in grades 1-8<sup>13</sup>. Varying discounts received by Franklin's students with Adventist church membership can bring that cost down to as low as \$6,100 per year. This widely contrasts with average per child education costs in the U.S. The National Center for Education Statistics in 2017 calculated the average costs to educate an elementary child in the U.S. at \$14,100 per student per year<sup>14</sup>. Tuition costs at Franklin are dramatically lower than the national average.

During the data collection process, the researcher met with the school's business manager and local church leaders who shared how the organizing churches (Greater Hope and Central City SDA Churches) provide significant annual subsidy allocations (in excess of \$150k) to the school in order to bring down the cost of education for all families. This allows Franklin to offer a lower cost tuition rate to community members. Through their internal church funds, Greater Hope and Central City Adventist churches provide additional worthy student tuition assistance to their church members with children who attend Franklin school and have demonstrated financial need. Franklin school also has a worthy student fund resourced by donors within the church community. This fund is used to provide scholarships to students who may come from families with financial need. Individual Adventist church members within the Franklin community also sponsor some students by providing contributions toward their

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix I for Franklin Tuition Fee Schedule

<sup>14</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2017. "Annual Report on Education Expenditures: International Comparisons." Washington, D.C. Retrieved June 1, 2021 (<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cmd>).

tuition. Franklin school has a low tuition cost relative to the national average, enabled by annual subsidies from its sponsor churches. This allows Franklin to offer a low-cost educational program to families from its predominantly Black and Brown community.

This collective economic resourcing represents significant financial investments that provide educational opportunity for students from Franklin's marginalized community. Franklin school's Black Adventist community provides a conspicuous example of resistance through self-determination, collectivization, and investment to facilitate educational affordability for their community.

In conclusion, findings from qualitative interviews and school achievement data reveal that all six elements of resistance are occurring within Franklin school. The establishment of Franklin school itself represented an act of resistance by parents, educators, and church administrators to counter the racial exclusion experienced by Black families at other schools in the area. Parents and teachers partner in a manner that invests time, support, and resource into students at Franklin. The engagement and investment by Black fathers combine with these efforts to resist broader social trends of disinvestment from Black children. Through high-commitment, high-investment, high-expectations, and cultural responsiveness, Franklin's teachers resist educational mediocrity, set high standards of excellence, and abandon pedagogies of racial exclusion. A school culture of Black excellence instills pride through cultural relevance and establishes an affirming learning environment for students. Parents' reasons for sending their children to Franklin represented acts of resistance against racially harmful environments and efforts to have their children in high achieving spaces that expanded

their opportunity. Teachers instill social consciousness within their students encouraging them to challenge, critique, and change their world—these being core elements of resistance. Administrators employ a diverse teaching staff and utilize positive behavioral management approaches thereby resisting punitive strategies that harm Black students. Franklin’s comparatively high achievement data suggests the effectiveness of teacher efforts to resist educational mediocrity through high standards of excellence. And finally, the collective economic resourcing within Franklin’s Black Adventist community provides a low-cost educational program for marginalized families and their children. At Franklin school, all six elements of resistance were found in all twelve domains.

**RQ4- Faith at Franklin School: *How does the faith-based philosophy of this school contribute to the academic development and success of Black students?***

The fourth research question of this study examines the influence of faith in the academic development and success of Black students. Data from qualitative interviews, school test scores, and curricular documents provide detailed answers to this question.

*Faith & the Village*

Franklin’s strong communal network between school, home, and church reflects a core model that is central to the denomination’s approach to Christian education (White, 1952; 1923). This integrative faith-based approach affirms partnerships between parents, teachers,

and the church community as the supportive framework for child development (White, 1952; 1923). Hence, the presence of this social network at Franklin is not an isolated dynamic but reflects an intentional educational approach within the denomination. Using this faith-based “village” framework, participants described how teachers at Franklin create a familial atmosphere in the classroom and plan school programs that bring students, parents, and teachers together. Students spend significant time together in school, after-school, and weekend church activities. Parents are highly involved within the school community and Black fathers are engaged in all areas of school life. This vibrant and supportive social network is facilitated by the local Black Adventist church community and its sponsor churches (Greater Hope and Central City SDA churches) that organized Franklin school (see Appendix G for school history). Thus, the village support network at Franklin school reflects a faith-based educational framework within the Seventh-day Adventist community. Interview data (pp. 131-134) describe how this supportive network positively influenced Franklin students’ academic and social development.

#### *Faith & Missional Pedagogy and Practice*

The missional pedagogy of teachers at Franklin that is a) student centered, b) features high-commitment, high-investment, and high-expectations, c) is culturally responsive, and d) facilitates critical thinking, is grounded in a faith-based philosophy of education within the denomination (White, 1923;1952). This faith-based philosophy informs teachers that all students are created in the image of God, are inherently valuable and gifted, and capable of high achievement and character, if properly nurtured (White, 1923;1952). This faith-based

philosophy is also embedded in the school's mission<sup>15</sup>. Hence, the missional pedagogy of Franklin's teachers which participants described as being highly influential on the academic achievement and development of students is informed by a faith-based philosophy of education within the denomination.

Qualitative interviews (pp. 130-133) described how teachers used faith to affirm students' beliefs and attitudes in their own ability to learn. Faith was their means of instilling confidence and esteem within students thereby promoting their academic ability. Students recited a daily creed that merged values of faith with student agency and reinforced pride, self-worth, and ability. And teachers used faith to both heighten students' personal academic expectations and employ as an interpretive lens to understand their world. Franklin's teachers use faith to inform and guide their pedagogy and practice.

### *Faith & the School Creed*

As mentioned in several of the interviews, the school creed is a foundational text that helps engender a positive outlook on life and learning for students at Franklin<sup>16</sup>. The creed is approximately one page in length and memorization is required of all students from pre-K -8<sup>th</sup> grade. Students recite the creed daily in the classroom which develops their skills in memorization and recitation. Several lines within the creed promote attitudes of personal empowerment, agency, and liberation. The creed also encourages students to adopt high

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix F for School Mission statement

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix H for the Franklin school creed

personal standards of excellence, resiliency of attitude, and self-motivation. In total, the school creed is an affirmation of student faith, character, opportunity, and destiny.

### *Faith & Curriculum*

The North American Division (NAD) of Seventh-day Adventists elementary curriculum standards are used throughout all Seventh-day Adventist schools in North America in grades K-12<sup>17</sup>. The researcher met with both the superintendent of schools, Alvin, and the associate superintendent (“Mrs. Johnson” who serves as curriculum specialist) to better understand this curriculum. Additionally, the researcher met with Franklin school teachers Natalie and Vanessa to understand how they implement this curriculum in their classrooms. The following is a brief summary of what was shared.

The NAD elementary curriculum is a standards-based curriculum used in Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools. These standards are aligned with federal Common Core standards and outline specific learning objectives across major subject areas including Bible, ELA, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Fine Arts, Physical Education, and Technology<sup>18</sup>. The NAD elementary standards “reflect the Adventist world view across the K-12 curricula as well as the integration of national and provincial/state standards”<sup>19</sup>. This faith-based framework incorporates the biblical themes of creation, the Fall, redemption, and recreation as foundational concepts that undergird all content areas and standards<sup>20</sup>. Mrs. Johnson shared

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<sup>17</sup> Seventh-day Adventists NAD Elementary Curriculum standards. Retrieved May, 24, 2021 (<https://adventisteducation.org/est.html>).

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix D for a sample of NAD K-8 curriculum standards

<sup>19</sup> Seventh-day Adventists NAD Elementary Curriculum standards. Retrieved May, 24, 2021 (<https://adventisteducation.org/est.html>).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

that the standards-based approach to learning is preferred over the textbook-based approach as the former ensures students understand particular concepts and are not limited to a specific textbook. Additionally, the standards-based approach allows teachers the flexibility to incorporate resources and materials they may deem as more effective in teaching to the standard.

This flexibility is particularly useful because where teachers at Franklin deemed curriculum resources were not rigorous enough for the learning expectations they had of their students, they brought in additional books and resources to support the rigor and learning they believed their students needed. They used resources like Wordly Wise<sup>21</sup>, Accelerated Reader<sup>22</sup>, MyOn free online library,<sup>23</sup> among several others to supplement and enhance student learning.

Teachers at Franklin shared what they viewed as a glaring weakness of the NAD curriculum—the absence of key cultural elements and knowledge needed for Black students. Teachers described how they incorporated books like Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* or Sharon Draper’s *Blended* to discuss themes of racial inequality, violence, and justice. One teacher has her pre-K students memorize and recite Useni Perkins’ poem “Hey Black Child” to teach the children racial identity, confidence, and agency<sup>24</sup>. Students recite poems like these in annual Black history programs and other school assemblies. Teachers exercise a pedagogical flexibility that takes personal initiative by supplementing the curriculum with valuable cultural knowledge and perspective for their students. They utilize the NAD curriculum standards as a

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<sup>21</sup> See <http://wordlywise3000.com/>

<sup>22</sup> See Accelerated Reader at <https://www.renaissance.com/products/accelerated-reader/>

<sup>23</sup> See Renaissance MyOn at <https://www.myon.com/index.html>

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix E for Useni Perkins’ poem “Hey Black Child”

framework upon which they build a robust faith-based and culturally responsive academic plan to meet the needs of their children.

A review of the curriculum standards reveals that they are organized in exhaustive detail enabling them to serve as a template for the specific concepts and skills students are expected to learn at each grade level<sup>25</sup>. The standards are color coded allowing for easy referral: green codes indicate Common Core State Standards, purple codes indicate NAD standards, blue codes indicate alignment with specific Adventist fundamental beliefs, and orange codes indicate alignment with educational standards for technology<sup>26</sup>. The Bible curriculum standards cover biblical foundations, biblical knowledge, relationship with God, relationship with others, and Adventist heritage. The ELA curriculum standards cover reading foundation, reading literature, reading informational texts, writing, speaking and listening, and language. The mathematics curriculum standards cover numbers and operations, operations and algebraic thinking, measurement, geometry, data analysis, statistics, and probability. The science curriculum standards cover life sciences, health sciences, earth and space sciences, physical sciences, and engineering technology and design. The social studies curriculum standards cover culture; time, continuity and change; people, places, and environments; individual development and identity; individuals, groups, and institutions; power, authority, and governance; production, distribution, and consumption; science, technology, and society; global connections; and civic

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix D for a sample of NAD K-8 curriculum standards

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

ideas and practices. Teachers use the codes and concepts within this framework to organize and guide their lesson planning.

Several general observations are that the NAD curriculum standards are virtually identical for all grades allowing teachers to build and expand on student knowledge and content from year to year. The standards also provide a structured framework for teachers to organize their lesson plans in a coherent and systematized manner. Finally, faith-based teachings and principles are interfused within standards enabling students to understand academic concepts through the lens of faith.

#### *Faith & School Mission Statement*

The school mission statement describes Franklin's commitment to the faith-centered, character focused, holistic development of the spiritual, mental, physical, and social capacities of its students<sup>27</sup>. Included within the mission is an affirmation of the principles of equity and opportunity to learn for all students. The mission statement reiterates the importance of a partnership between parent, teacher, and student as the proper framework for success. It also features a specific statement on the commitment to students from all racial and class backgrounds. Franklin's mission further extols its purpose as educating all students toward high academic achievement. Finally, the mission expresses a commitment to supporting student learning within a safe and nurturing environment. Many of these objectives within the mission statement align with characterizations of Franklin school by parents, teachers, and administrators in the qualitative interviews.

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix F for Franklin's mission statement

### *Faith & Achievement*

Finally, Franklin's test score data may suggest the effectiveness of the Seventh-day Adventist faith-based educational approach particularly amongst Black students compared to their peers in public and private schools locally and nationwide (see Tables 6 and 12-15).

### *Franklin School & Faith*

Franklin school is the creation of a Black Seventh-day Adventist religious community. As such, faith is integrated in most areas of student life. The strong social network of parents, educators, and church community evidenced in the Franklin community reflects a denominational model that characterizes the Seventh-day Adventist approach to Christian education (White, 1952; 1923). The missional pedagogy and practice of Franklin's teachers is informed by a faith-based belief that all students are created in the image of God, are inherently valuable and gifted, and capable of high achievement and character if properly nurtured (White, 1952; 1923). The faith-based school creed reinforces excellence and high expectation as the standard for student attainment. Teachers use a denominational curriculum that integrates principles of faith with academic concepts. The school mission is centered toward the holistic development of the spiritual, mental, physical, and social capacities of its students. And finally, school achievement data reflects high achievement amongst Franklin's predominantly Black student body and may suggest the effectiveness of the Seventh-day Adventist faith-based educational approach with Black children. In summary, these are the ways the faith-based philosophy contributes to the academic development and success of Black students.

## *Chapter Summary*

This study explored a Black Seventh-day Adventist elementary school to understand its influence on the academic, social, and cultural development of Black students. Using the qualitative case study tradition, four data sources were examined to provide insights into the nature and quality of Franklin school. These data sources included eight key informant interviews, a parent focus group, school achievement data, and curricular documents and the school website. The four research questions of this study were answered and used to uncover six qualitative factors that influence Black student achievement and development. Included within these findings are the core elements of liberation and resistance at work within Franklin school that are empowering Black students. In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed along with limitations and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

## **Chapter Six: Discussion, Limitations, Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Future Research**

### Introduction

This qualitative case study explored a Black operated Seventh-day Adventist school in an urban metropolitan area to understand its influence on Black student achievement and development. Looking at four data sources which included eight key informant interviews, a focus group interview, longitudinal school test score data, curricular and other school documents, the researcher gained valuable insight into the nature and quality of this school. Findings offer significant insights into effective approaches for educating Black students toward high achievement. These insights are now discussed.

### Discussion

#### **Major Findings**

##### *Achievement and Affordability at Franklin school*

Longitudinal achievement data reveal that students at Franklin are achieving at high levels relative to their peers in public and private schools both nationally and within their state (Tables 4-15). Furthermore, findings from Franklin cohort data suggest that the longer students attend Franklin school, the better they perform academically—a finding similar to that from the Adventist commissioned CognitiveGenesis study (Thayer and Kido, 2012). Whereas the CognitiveGenesis study documented the positive impact of longevity on student achievement in Adventist schools, cohort data from Franklin school similarly identified the long-term impact of

Adventist education on student achievement. The CognitiveGenesis longitudinal study assessed over 50,000 students in Adventist elementary and high schools nationwide and found these students outperformed their peers in public and private schools nationally in all grades and all subjects (Thayer and Kido, 2012). Findings from the CognitiveGenesis study identified the Adventist system, philosophy, curriculum, and approach to education as supporting these achievement outcomes (Thayer and Kido, 2012). Achievement findings from this research on Franklin school comport with those from the CognitiveGenesis study. As Franklin serves predominantly Black students within an urban metropolitan community, these findings are compelling and underscore the strength of its academic program and its positive impact on Black student achievement. Additional qualitative findings provide detailed descriptions of the characteristics and elements within Franklin school that may be driving such achievement.

Furthermore, Franklin’s denominational tuition rate<sup>28</sup> is less than half the national average costs for educating U.S. elementary students<sup>29</sup>. Hence, Franklin school is realizing high achievement outcomes for Black students compared to national norms at less than half the national average costs.

These achievement and affordability findings demonstrate that within supportive educational environments, urban Black students are capable of strong achievement. This has broader implications for urban education including a direct challenge to “culture of poverty” narratives and approaches that see deficits in children or the communities and cultures from

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix I for Franklin Tuition Fee Schedule

<sup>29</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2017. “Annual Report on Education Expenditures: International Comparisons.” Washington, D.C. Retrieved June 1, 2021 (<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cmd>).

which they derive (Bourgeois, 2001; Lewis, 1969; Small, Harding and Lamont, 2010). These achievement and affordability findings also demonstrate that particular communities are capable of accomplishing better educational outcomes for Black students, at lower costs, and without a dime of federal support. That large majorities of Black children across the nation are anchored to low achievement outcomes is an indictment of the social and educational systems to which they are subject and not a failure intrinsic to Black students themselves.

### *Opportunity and Investment*

Findings from this study that identified strong social networks, liberatory pedagogy, and strong achievement align with opportunity gap literature and reveal that when given sufficient opportunity and investment, Black students can experience high achievement similar to other groups (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013). Franklin school is a story of opportunity and investment. Educators at Franklin fill the teacher quality gap, the challenging curricula gap, and the cultural congruence gap between student and educator resulting in Black student engagement and achievement (Aronson and Laughter, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Milner, 2013). Teachers approach students with neither deficit mindsets nor low expectations. Whereas unequal social and economic inputs into Black and Brown students is a gap endemic to the capitalist political economy (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Kozol, 2005; Rothstein, 2004; Rowley and Wright, 2011), parents and teachers at Franklin as well as church community counter these negative social forces through collectivization. This collectivizing features parents, teachers and church community leveraging their combined economic, social, cultural, and academic resources to support students and their families. Findings revealing these strong social networks indicate that such collective resourcing and investment can be an

effective strategy for strengthening achievement and narrowing opportunity gaps for Black students.

## **Six Qualitative Findings**

### *Considering the Six Qualitative Findings*

Six qualitative themes emerged from the research including the need for Black space, strong village networks, missional pedagogy, intersectionality, social learning and consciousness, and administration and behavior management. The implications of these thematic findings are now considered.

#### **“The Need for Black Space”**

Parents and educators at Franklin shared their lived experiences with bias, exclusion, discrimination, and racism at other schools. Black parents shared their experiences witnessing their children in predominantly White schools being excluded and not receiving the same opportunities as White students. One educator at Franklin relayed being discriminated against for a teaching position in a predominantly White school. Another parent expressed her frustration observing her Black son unfairly disciplined by White educators, an experience that led her to transfer him to Franklin school. These micro experiences represent ongoing realities that Black parents and students face with White teachers within predominantly White schools and comport with the literature which identifies unconscious teacher bias, low expectations, teacher attitudes and beliefs, punitive behavioral approaches, cultural exclusion, and microaggressions as factors that create racially harmful educational contexts for Black children (Downey and Pribesh, 2004; Keels, Durkee, and Hope, 2017; Lustick, 2017; McGrady and

Reynolds, 2013; Moore, 2017; Oates, 2003; Peterson, 2016; Sue et al., 2007; van Den Bergh, 2010).

These harmful ongoing realities of racism, discrimination, cultural exclusion, and unconscious bias within many U.S. schools (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Delgado and Stefancic, 2017; Keels, Durkee, and Hope, 2017; Lustick, 2017; Omi and Winant, 2015; Peterson, 2016) mean that Black and Brown students remain vulnerable and need safe educational spaces. However, these safe spaces cannot be limited to predominantly Black or Brown school environments. Black and Brown students need to be safe at any school. Schools like Franklin will not be necessary when the humanity of Black children is recognized, affirmed, protected, and uplifted by all administrators and educators in every school.

#### “It Takes a Village”

The strong social networks between parents, teachers, students, and church community described by participants feature mutually reinforcing bands of support around Black children. Such networks provided needed investments into Black students and narrowed opportunity gaps (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hill, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013). Within this network, parents were highly involved, aware of research on Black students, and used this knowledge to guide their educational decisions for their children.

These findings on strong social networks and parent involvement demonstrate that knowledge and resource are already existent within Black communities. Paternalistic approaches and “solutions” to educational reform that disregard this preexistent knowledge and resource within the communities they seek to impact are misguided. Parents know what is

best for their children and are capable of providing it. Where parents are empowered to self-determine and exercise this capability, the academic success of their students is a likely consequence. Findings from this study reveal how parent voices are respected and centered in Franklin school in a manner that facilitates partnership and collaboration with the school and its educators. The positive impact of such parental involvement on student academic success is well documented in the literature (Hayes, 2012; Lee and Bowen, 2006; Roscigno, 1998).

These findings on strong social networks and parent involvement also draw needed attention to the importance of Black male involvement in education. Participants described a strong and active presence of working class and middle-class Black fathers in Franklin school. This finding not only counters stereotypes of the uninvolved or absent Black father (Bennett, 2002; Edin, Tach and Mincy, 2009; Moynihan, 1965), but also demonstrate how Black fathers want and enjoy being involved in their children's educational development. The research at Franklin revealed that such participation by Black fathers is not anomalous and is likely an influential factor in student success. Administrators and teachers at Franklin welcome and encourage this engagement, suggesting that similar efforts which foster a climate of engagement may prove beneficial in other school contexts.

Finally, findings on the Franklin Adventist community reveal that through collective economic resourcing, local Adventist churches and Franklin school help support families from less advantaged backgrounds. Specifically, Greater Hope and Central City SDA churches provide annual financial subsidies to Franklin school. These subsidies bring down the cost of tuition for all families at Franklin school. These two churches also provide worthy student financial assistance to families at Franklin with financial need. Additionally, Franklin school offers worthy

student financial scholarships to students with financial need. Individual church members from Greater Hope and Central City SDA also sponsor students by covering their tuition costs. These and other measures support families from less advantaged backgrounds and make Franklin's educational program available for all families. This reality then underscores the continuing role and relevance of Black churches in supporting educational opportunity and achievement for Black children, findings consistent with the established literature (Barrett, 2009, 2010; Byfield, 2008; Jeynes, 2010, 2015; Madyun and Lee, 2010; McCray, Grant, and Beachum, 2010; Toldson and Anderson, 2010).

#### "Missional Pedagogy and High-Quality Teachers"

This study documented a particular pedagogical approach used by teachers at Franklin, coined "missional pedagogy". Teachers approach instruction with a strong sense of mission to ensure the full development of students toward their maximum capabilities. This missional approach is informed by teachers understanding the myriad challenges Black students face in the world and their determination to effectively prepare them for it. In this respect, missional pedagogy is a *liberatory* pedagogy. The four features of this pedagogy (centered around the needs of the student, features high commitment-high investment-high expectations, is culturally relevant, and facilitates critical thinking) all have liberatory impact. This pedagogy of liberation invests students with culturally relevant learning, challenges them through high expectations, develops their confidence, self-knowledge, and agency, and prepares them to engage the world from their own perspective. Researchers note that culturally relevant pedagogies like Franklin's support students of diverse backgrounds (Aronson and Laughter, 2016; Dover, 2013; Gay, 2013; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006; Love and

Kruger, 2005). Additionally, the fact that educators at Franklin are highly qualified (most possessing graduate degrees and engaged in ongoing professional development) and racially diverse positions them to achieve strong academic results in the classroom, a finding also identified in the literature (Koedel, 2008; Milner, 2013; Moore, 2017; Okpala, Rotich-Tanui, and Ardley, 2009). Liberatory pedagogies like Franklin’s missional pedagogy effectively equip Black students for academic success, social struggle, and empowerment. Findings from this study demonstrate the positive impact of liberatory pedagogical approaches on the academic trajectories of Black children.

The culturally relevant missional pedagogy of teachers at Franklin also counters what this researcher terms “double alienation”. Within traditional school contexts, Black students experience cultural exclusion from their learning and become alienated from their education (Akua, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Lomotey, 1992). This alienation is then intensified as Black students are also denied the cultural and historical knowledge to inform their emerging ethnic identities (Shevalier and McKenzie, 2012; Shockley, 2008; Woodson, 2000). Such denial means Black students become alienated from themselves and their cultural heritage. They neither relate to their instruction nor understand their cultural identity—they are doubly alienated. Findings from this research assert that culturally relevant curricula and instruction are necessary to both connect Black students with their learning and their cultural heritage in an effort to create engaged, confident learners with healthy esteems and self-concept. When Black students can identify with their classroom learning and develop a knowledge of their cultural heritage, historical contributions, and perspectives, this counters systemic school

processes that facilitate double alienation and cultural genocide (Akua, 2019; Shockley, 2008, 2020; Short, 2010; Woodson, 2000).

#### “The Intersection of Race, Class, and Faith”

Findings from this study also revealed that Franklin school reflects a distinct convergence of race, faith, and class. Within the Franklin community these three social categories combine in a manner that challenges Black students towards academic excellence, imbues them with confidence and character, and establishes a foundation for future mobility through college and career readiness.

Within the racial category, participants described Franklin as a place of “Black excellence” which they characterized as academic achievement, cultural competence, and social consciousness. That this school environment of “Black excellence” pairs with Franklin’s strong achievement outcomes may be more than incidental. Gay notes that culturally relevant teaching makes learning encounters more effective for ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2010). Ladson-Billings observes that the core elements of culturally relevant pedagogy include cultural competence, academic achievement, and socio-political consciousness and these approaches support stronger academic achievement for students from non-White and marginalized communities (Aronson and Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006). The literature suggests that Franklin’s affirming racial environment may be empowering its students’ academic achievement.

Within the category of faith, teachers described how they used faith to instill confidence in students’ ability to learn. They described how faith is reinforced in the creed, the curricula,

and the classroom instruction. That faith is integrated in the academic experience to heighten achievement also aligns with the literature. Jeynes found that personal religious faith reduced achievement gaps for Black and Brown students by 50% while attending a religious school reduced the gap by 25% (Jeynes, 2010, 2015). The positive impact of religious socialization on Black student achievement is well documented (Barrett, 2009, 2010; Byfield, 2008; Jeynes, 2010, 2014, 2015; Madyun and Lee, 2010; Thayer and Kido, 2012; Toldson and Anderson, 2010). Franklin achievement outcomes then provide another empirical data point that comports with the literature on the benefits of faith and academic achievement for Black children.

Finally, within the class category, Franklin's students come from predominantly Black families from lower, working, and middle-class backgrounds. Participants shared how Franklin facilitates students' future mobility by preparing them with a foundation for college and career readiness. This is a particularly insightful finding as research documents how Black families hold stronger beliefs in the value of schooling as a vehicle for social mobility (Harris, 2008; Browman, 2019). This belief in education as a tool for social uplift within the American occupational structure dates as far back as Du Bois (Blau and Dudley, 1967; DuBois, 1903; Goldsmith, 2004). Participants shared this enduring perspective of class mobility. Within capitalist societies, members of varying social classes aim to improve their socio-economic status through education. American schools are centers of economic reproduction that prepare students to integrate into the labor hierarchy (Althusser, 2014; Anyon, 1980; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Oakes, 2005). Marginalized classes continue to track within this system in hopes of improving their social and economic conditions. Findings from this research reveal

that these remain strategies and aspirations within Black communities to improve their social class position through education.

These findings on the intersectionality of race, faith, and class reveal how Black communities draw on cultural strengths within their race and religion to leverage opportunity and success for their children through education. This convergence of racial affirmation, religious socialization, and class-based high educational beliefs may constitute a consequential blend with positive cumulative effects on Black student achievement and development. The empirical testing of these potentially cumulative relationships presents future research possibilities.

#### “Social Learning and Social Consciousness”

Participants also described Franklin school as a place of opportunity for social development. Students receive social opportunities for leadership development, demonstrate their gifts and abilities through peer engagement, co-create their classroom learning experience through the intentional elevation of their voices by teachers, and develop social consciousness through classroom learning and community service. Several teachers at Franklin explained how their classrooms were dialogical spaces where they integrated student perspectives into the educational experience, an approach described in the literature (Apple, 2008; Bigelow, 1990; Freire, 2018). Such an approach recognizes that children do not enter the classroom as valueless blank slates, but possess knowledge, backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences that can add value to the learning environment if tapped. Teachers shared how they recognize and extract this value by partnering with students in the learning experience. And this practice is

particularly meaningful for urban educators—*Black students are given voice*, and this opportunity reaffirms their agency. These findings signify that when students’ humanity is valued and their lived experiences drawn upon in the classroom, this can create a more cooperative and supportive learning environment for Black children (Apple, 2008; Bigelow, 1990; Freire, 2018).

Teachers also shared how they engaged students in socio-political conversations to elevate their voices and raise their awareness. Educational researchers suggest the particular importance of these socio-political conversations within marginalized communities (Dantley, 2010; Dover, 2013; Freire, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006). Finally, although students’ social consciousness as revealed in participant interviews and school documents cannot be characterized as a fully class-based analysis and consciousness of social struggle, qualitative data did reflect their understanding of struggle within their particular social location. Whereas class and race are co-constructed social categories, students understand they are a part of an oppressed class within society whose humanity and opportunity are historically and presently denied in many ways. When educators ignore these social realities in the classroom, they leave Black students vulnerable and ill-prepared to face a racially harsh social environment.

#### “School Administration and Behavior Management”

Qualitative interviews revealed that school administrators aim to provide a supportive environment for teachers and students. Participants believed that when the right balance of support and accountability is provided for teachers, students are the beneficiaries. This supportive emphasis also informs the school’s behavior management approach toward

students. School staff forego punitive management models in a deliberate effort to not reproduce racial discipline disparities present within many US schools (Lustick, 2017; Schiff, 2018; Quimby, 2021). Administrators and teachers instead employed positive reinforcement strategies that challenged students towards excellence and developed a culture of expectation. They shared that through this approach, student cooperation and desired behaviors are normative within the school. Suspension rates are remarkably low (one administrator recounting only one suspension in her several years of leadership with no expulsions).

Although the Franklin sample size is small, these findings do indicate the presence of effective management strategies that do not harm urban Black students through excessive punishment. Research has documented the positive impact of restorative justice educational approaches in school behavior management (Karp and Breslin, 2001; Lustick, 2017; Mayworm, 2016; Schiff, 2018; Quimby, 2021). Although the strategies at Franklin cannot be characterized as restorative justice educational practice, they do align with restorative principles of inclusion, respect, mutual accountability, communal balance, and redemption (Lustick, 2017, Quimby, 2021; Zehr, 2015). Such values affirm the humanity of Black children, protecting them from retributive culture, and interrupt punitive approaches and processes that facilitate the school to prison pipeline in Black communities. Findings on Franklin school's behavior management approach suggest that more humane and redemptive management approaches toward Black students may yield student respect and cooperation, creating a more effective institutional culture.

## Sociological Analysis

### *On Liberation, Resistance, and Reproduction*

This study identified core elements of liberation and resistance at work within Franklin school. However, despite these liberatory elements, Franklin school as most others still aligns with broader processes of social reproduction within the market-based political economy. As an accredited institution, Franklin must still satisfactorily purvey the skills, concepts, and knowledge forms necessary to prepare students for their ultimate entry into the labor economy. Franklin's role in preparing its students with a foundation towards college and career readiness facilitates these reproductive ends. As most schools, Franklin then fulfills an institutional role within the broader social system as a center of economic reproduction (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Althusser, 2014). Whereas many substandard schools in the US prepare their Black populations for integration into the lower rungs of the occupational hierarchy as low wage earners, Franklin facilitates this same occupational integration albeit allocating its students toward a higher stratum of the hierarchy as professional class workers.

Herein then lies the dueling tension and contradiction between forces of liberation and resistance on one end, and processes of social reproduction on the other—both existent within the same institution. Franklin liberates its students while preparing them to integrate within an unequal economic order. Giroux identifies this dialectic between reproductive structure and human agency to resist this structure (Giroux, 1983). Within marginalized communities, dueling social forces are held together in dialectical tension. However, in his emphasis on human agency, Giroux insists that subordinated communities are not merely passive subjects of

hegemonic social structure but have agency to resist it. Franklin can then best be understood as a site of counter hegemonic struggle (Apple, 2008). Laying amidst the politically contested terrains of the urban metropolis, Franklin sits at the tenuous intersection of race, class, and power (Lipman, 2008).

At this intersection, the Franklin Adventist community discharges a real cultural politics and oppositional culture, steeling their Black children against the harms of educational racism and positioning them towards more advantageous economic outcomes and opportunities. This oppositional culture counters pedagogies of racial exclusion through affirmative and liberatory pedagogies that empower Black children. Teachers are curators and conveyors of counter hegemonic cultural knowledge in the classroom. Parents and church community counter Black child disinvestment through collectivization thereby ameliorating opportunity gaps. And students are invested with socio-political consciousness and tools of analysis to critique and challenge the injustices of their world. These represent counter hegemonic conflicts of race and economy—political struggles encompassing both class and culture (Giroux, 1983). To the extent that these findings have heuristic value, Franklin school is a case study in how Black communities marshal their political and economic resources to withstand a fiercely antagonistic and stifling social reality.

#### *Liberation and Resistance as Dialogical Action*

Hence, the Franklin Adventist community is engaged in dialogical action—efforts to assert their humanity and that of their children amidst the confining conditions of American racism and social inequality. In his theory of cultural action, Freire asserted that dialogical and

anti-dialogical action are positioned in dialectical tension (Freire, 2017). Defining dialogue as “the encounter between man, mediated by the world, in order to name the world”, Freire’s dialogical action may be understood as the instrument of freedom that advances humanity (Freire, 2017). Conversely, anti-dialogical action may be understood as the instrument of oppression that advances domination and subordination (Freire, 2017). In the Freirian sense then, liberation and resistance are dialogical actions while domination and subordination are anti-dialogical actions. Dialogical action is the means by which humankind demonstrates significance, agency, and humanity; this action supports humankind’s power to make and remake, create and re-create (Freire, 2017). Franklin school, therefore, is the creative manifestation of dialogical action engaged by members of its Black Adventist community. These members employed dialogical action to critique, challenge, and change social structure at the institutional level thereby creating a new institutional structure for the liberation and humanity of their children.

### *Race, Education, and Social Struggle*

This dialogical action of the Franklin Adventist community demonstrates that there are multiple points of entry into social struggle. Counterhegemonic struggle against White supremacy and capitalist inequality is waged on multiple fronts. Communities resist the systems and conditions of their oppression in myriad ways including social activism, social movement politics, electoral politics, and community action, to name a few. However, this resistance is also waged within educational systems and institutions. Recognizing the irreparable harm perpetuated against Black personhood within American schools, Carter Woodson famously declared that the Negro is first lynched in the classroom (Woodson, 2000).

In urban communities today, the school continues to serve as a site of political contestation—a seminal space of social struggle (Apple, 2008; Bigelow, 1990; Lipman, 2008). The school remains a powerful vehicle of socialization where Black children learn their limitations or actualize their agency. Franklin’s founders predetermined that their school would be a space for the actualization of Black student agency.

### *Liberation and the Role of the Black Church*

Findings of this study then underscore the continuing role and agency of the Black church within Black communities. From its earliest days as the “invisible institution” to the present, the Black church in America has served as a protective and supportive habitus for Black peoples from the brutal and restrictive constraints of White supremacy (Dubois, 1994; Franklin, 1994; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Mitchell, 2004; Quarles, 1987, Raboteau, 1978; Wilmore, 2004). Additionally, through its long history of educational advocacy, the Black church has had an indispensable role in the education of Black youth through its establishing of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), historically Black academies, primary schools, and educational institutions across the nation for over 160 years (Dubois, 1994; Franklin, 1994; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Mitchell, 2004; Quarles, 1987). Findings reveal that in many ways Black churches still operate in these historical roles.

Franklin school’s organizing Black Adventist churches demonstrate that Black churches remain vital and viable centers of political organization, economic collectivization, and cultural reaffirmation. They continue to serve central roles in coordinating Black constituencies toward the realization of their social and spiritual interests. They remain spiritual centers of protection,

support, and empowerment for Black families. They remain centers of educational advocacy and mission, establishing and supporting schools for the effective instruction of Black children.

Dantley and Wilmore acknowledge that Black churches are rooted in historical concepts of liberation and overcoming adversity and oppression (Dantley, 2010; Wilmore, 2004).

Dantley identifies an ethic within Black churches which he terms “critical spirituality”. Critical spirituality is comprised of four elements: critical self-reflection, deconstructive interpretation, performative creativity, and transformative action (Dantley, 2010). Dantley contends that critically spiritual educators invest students with 1.) cultural knowledge, 2.) political consciousness, and 3.) spiritual reliance. Interview data identified these same three elements of critical spirituality at work within Franklin school. Animated then by the ethic of critical spirituality, Black churches and their schools continue the work of supporting educational opportunity for their communities. Black Seventh-day Adventism moves within this same historical tradition of liberation, operating a system of primary and secondary schools in urban communities nationwide, including its own HBCU. Franklin Adventist school then, like so many others, fulfills a critical role for Black families living in urban spaces. It is the product of an educational activism that remains alive within the ethos of Black religion. This educational activism remains grounded in the core belief of the humanity of all communities and the birth right to knowledge and opportunity for their families. Such activism is essential and empowering and creates spaces of protection and support that leave Black children free to pursue their excellence.

## Significance of the Study

This study fills several gaps in the academic literature as previously identified in the literature review (see chapter 2). First, this research adds to the scant literature on Black faith-based schools by empirically documenting the positive influence of Black faith-based educational environments on Black student learning. It counters the seeming marginalization of Black faith-based educational spaces in academic research by exposing this space to sociological inquiry and analysis.

Secondly, this study builds on the growing body of empirical research on culturally relevant educational (CRE) approaches and their impact on Black student achievement. As previously noted in the review of the literature, the theoretical basis for CRE has been well established by Gay, Ladson-Billings, and others (Aronson and Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2014). However, though empirical validation of CRE's positive impact is increasingly documented in research (Atwater, Russell, and Butler, 2014; Caballero, 2010; Civil and Khan, 2001; Dimick, 2012; Epstein, et al., 2011; Fulton, 2009; Hubert, 2013; Johnson, 2011; Langlie, 2008; Martell, 2013), it remains a growing area. This study adds to this growing body of research by documenting the positive impact of culturally relevant educational approaches within the Black faith-based context.

Thirdly, this study pivots from over six decades of educational research using the achievement gap framework in preference for the opportunity gap framework (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hill, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013). As such, this study focuses on how social, economic, and academic investments can be directed toward Black students. It

highlights how communities raise the level of social inputs into Black students as a means to ameliorate educational inequality and racial achievement disparities. Findings from this study represent viable solutions for raising academic achievement amongst Black students and document the efficacy of the opportunity and investment approach in urban education.

Fourthly, this study fills the gap in educational research on Black Seventh-day Adventist schools. It pioneers the work of sociological research into Black Adventist schools, a research area that is virtually non-existent within the denomination. Such research will benefit the Black Adventist faith community by providing new knowledge on effective pedagogy and practice, achievement and student outcomes, organizational culture and administration, and viable funding approaches for Black Adventist schools.

Fifthly, this research identifies Franklin school as a site of counterhegemonic struggle and dialogical action. As such, it provides empirical support to the critical pedagogy theoretical concepts of liberation and resistance as articulated by Freire, Giroux, and Apple. However, this research represents an extension of critical pedagogy theory into the sphere of Black liberation (Ansbro, 2000; Cone, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Mitchell, 2004; Raboteau, 1978; Wilmore, 2004; Wyman, 2018). It merges critical pedagogy concepts within the Black social and spiritual context. Specifically, it uncovers and connects the themes of liberatory pedagogies, dialogics, Black collectivization, cultural relevance and identity, Black traditions of faith as an empowering spiritual resource, socio-political consciousness and agency, Black safety and protection, and Black self-determination and social uplift. These themes are connected in a manner that melds critical pedagogy to the Black liberatory tradition. This fusion of sociological theory and Black

liberation may better enable urban educators, policy makers, theorists, and practitioners to apply useful sociological concepts to Black educational contexts.

Finally, this case study provides a template for how urban communities navigate the challenging contours of education, power, and social struggle. It provides a new way of thinking about liberation, faith, and Black academic achievement. This template links: 1) Black educational safe space, 2) strong social networks, 3) missional pedagogy, 4) the beneficial nexus of race, class, and faith, 5) social consciousness and leadership development, and 6) affirmative behavior management strategy, to strong Black student outcomes and achievement. This linkage may aid sociologists and educational researchers in better understanding how Black religious communities defend their humanity and improve their collective outcomes and opportunities through education.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. The first limitation is the small sample size of the subject school. This small sample size precludes the generalizability of findings, but as is the case with qualitative inquiry, findings may be transferrable to other contexts (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Secondly, the sample size for Franklin cohort data (Table 11) is also small and reflects limited data available to the researcher. Nonetheless cohort data still reflects actual student scores and provides an additional data point alongside the more substantial six years of longitudinal data.

Thirdly, Franklin's student composition is not comprised of students from predominantly low-income family backgrounds. Students come from a diverse mix of lower class, working class, and middle-class families. Such a composition that includes middle class families may be positively impacting school achievement scores. However, inasmuch as middle-class families have more social and economic capital to invest in their children (Peterson and Llaudet, 2007), this essentially underscores the central tenet of the opportunity gap framework—that students with greater social and economic investments are afforded opportunities that positively influence academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hill, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013). Franklin's diverse class composition and its possible positive academic impact is then a reaffirmation of the opportunity gap framework and not an argument against it.

Fourthly, participants for interviews included administrators, teachers, parents, and historical informants—but not the direct participation of students. Though the voices of students are reflected in the school social justice video, their direct participation was not a part of the research design due to common rule research restrictions on minors. However, parent, teacher, and administrative participants provided an indirect witness to student attitudes, motivation, and development.

Finally, interview participants were selected through purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling procedure. Although nonprobability sampling is useful in qualitative research, its limitations include its ability to offer accurate and precise representations of a population (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This study makes no claim to the precise representativeness of interview data to the Franklin population, but instead samples a broad

variety of stakeholders to provide important perspectives within the Franklin school community.

### **Recommendations for Practice, Policy, and Future Research**

Findings of this research lend to several recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.

#### *Recommendations for Urban Education*

This study focused on a predominantly Black faith-based school in an urban community. Research findings, therefore, lend to several important recommendations for urban education. Where opportunity gaps may be partially bridged through networks of social support for Black students, rigorous efforts to build these networks around students should be engaged. For one, urban educators and administrators must build strong parent-teacher partnerships with strategic intentionality, promoting such partnerships as essential and normative within the institutional culture of their school. Qualitative data from this study provide several examples of how teachers and principals built these partnerships with success. Additionally, school administrators can engage partnerships with churches and other socially supportive organizations through “adopt-a-school” initiatives to create needed communal support systems around Black children.

Also, whereas racism, discrimination, and unconscious teacher bias are real and harm the academic trajectories of diverse students, school administrators, educators, and policy makers must make determined efforts to root out such damaging influences. This can be achieved by initiating independent review for evidence of these harmful practices within their

schools, ensuring ongoing diversity training for educational staff, adopting culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy, ensuring meaningful diversity in educational staff compositions and hiring, and educating staff, students, and parents toward cultural competence. Such efforts will help schools become safe spaces for Black and Brown students and counter the harmful impacts of educational racism.

Effective urban educators must recognize and reflect on the social contexts from which students emerge and employ liberatory pedagogies in their practice with Black children and other students from diverse communities. Where urban educators are highly committed to the academic success of Black students and approach them with cultural relevance and high expectations, student academic outcomes are raised. The benefits of such liberatory pedagogies are identified by numerous educational researchers (Akua, 2019; Dover, 2013; Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006; Shevalier and McKenzie, 2012; Shockley, 2015). This means urban educators and policy makers must challenge and replace culturally exclusive educational frameworks and curricula not only in schools with diverse student populations, but also schools of homogenous composition. Curricula must be recreated, culturally inclusive books and resources must be integrated into teacher lesson plans, and teachers must be trained to incorporate culturally relevant practice into the classroom. Culturally relevant education (CRE) must be standardized across the field of urban education to ensure students' identities and the cultural-historical contributions of their communities are represented and elevated in their learning. Such representation is of critical benefit to the academic experience and achievement of students from marginalized

communities (Akua, 2019; Aronson and Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006; Lomotey, 1992; Shevalier and McKenzie, 2012; Shockley, 2015).

Additionally, findings on student social consciousness in this study revealed that when teachers validate the lived experiences of students in the classroom through dialogue, this heightens students' engagement and achievement. Students' voices and backgrounds, then, must be respected in the classroom and their social consciousness raised in a manner that provides them with the critical and conceptual tools to interpret, understand, and critique their social reality. Urban educators must embrace their role as political agents, building the power of their students by raising their social consciousness and elevating their sense of social responsibility. Black students are instilled with a sense of leadership, empowerment, and possibility when they are taught their agency to effect change in the world.

This study also identified small class size and individualization as a benefit to the learning and achievement of Black students. Therefore, policy efforts directed towards lowering student to teacher ratios may enable teachers to support the needs of diverse students more effectively.

Whereas religious faith is an influential variable for Black and Brown student achievement (Barrett, 2009, 2010; Byfield, 2008; Jeynes, 2010, 2014, 2015; Madyun and Lee, 2010; Thayer and Kido, 2012; Toldson and Anderson, 2010), its benefits should be understood by educators and extracted. Within public school contexts this may mean greater emphasis on character education and encouraging students to tap into their own cultural and spiritual resources to strengthen their achievement.

To mitigate racial discipline gaps and an overreliance on punishment, educational staff should receive ongoing professional development on positive behavior management strategies. Urban educators must recognize the harms of punitive approaches and abandon them for affirmative approaches that challenge students toward excellence. Additionally, findings from this study revealed that when teachers are supported by school administrators, this support directly redounds to the benefit of students. Urban school administrators, then, must work to engender an organizational culture of safety, support, and protection that creates a nurturing environment where Black students can thrive.

### *Implications for Future Research*

Because the body of faith-based research is limited, particularly with respect to Black faith-based schools, future research should focus on these communities to fill these gaps. Such research can explore the more intricate relationships between faith and achievement using quantitative methodologies. Quantitative methods are useful in determining the relationships between variables and their significance. Quantitative methods could test for correlations between faith and achievement, religious activity and achievement, or the possible cumulative effects of religious activity and religious school attendance on achievement, to name a few. The impact of Black faith-based schools on low-income families also presents additional research possibilities. Future research can directly explore student perspectives and experiences within the Black Adventist school system. Far more educational research on Black and Brown Seventh-day Adventist schools is needed to provide insights into their influence and effectiveness. Finally, future research should use the opportunity gap framework to focus policy and practice efforts on providing supports and investment for students from

marginalized communities. This effort must place far greater emphasis on social and economic inputs instead of decontextualized analyses of academic outputs.

### **Conclusion**

Though the educational outlook in many US communities has been bleak for generations, it is not without its areas of promise. The problems in American education are historical, systemic, persistent, and deeply stratified along racial and class lines. Whereas broad scale social and economic investments and reform must be enacted to ensure universal quality, equity, and access, solutions for educational reform may not lay solely in top-down policy prescriptions. Some solutions for educational reform may arise from the bottom up. Where communities are experiencing success in urban education, it is the responsibility of scientific research to both uncover and uplift it. Such is the impetus for this study. Faith-based communities hold untold stories of educational success and achievement for students from marginalized families. These stories reveal efforts of resistance against intransigent social forces and liberation from hegemonic ideological frameworks. It is the hope of the researcher that this scholarship along with broader systemic efforts toward educational reform and investment may help lead the way to a future where educational excellence, possibility, and opportunity are realities for all students across the nation—including millions of Black children living in urban space.

## Appendix A

### Key Informant Interview Questions

The first four questions are standard questions asked of each key informant and were aimed at extracting information that could help answer the four research questions. Four additional questions were asked that are specific to the informant type (administrator, teacher, historical informant). These specific informant questions explored elements of liberation and resistance as empirically constructed and defined in this study:

#### *Standard questions*

1. In your view, are there elements or factors at this school that contribute to student academic success? If so, what are they? (RQ:1,2)
2. How does this school influence Black students? Explain. (RQ:2, 3)
3. How does this school influence the social and cultural development of its students? Explain. (RQ:1,2,3)
4. How does the faith-based philosophy of this school influence Black academic development and success? Explain. (RQ:4)

#### *Administrator questions*

5. What is the behavior management approach at this school? Describe. (RQ:3)
6. What is the racial composition of the staff? What impact (if any) does this have on the student educational experience? (RQ:3)
7. How would you characterize the teacher quality at this school? What is the education level and is there ongoing professional development? (RQ:3)
8. How would you describe the organizational culture and educational environment of this school? How would you characterize your engagement with parents? With students? (RQ:3)

### *Teacher questions*

5. How would you describe your pedagogical approach toward students? How do you put this pedagogy into practice? (RQ:3)
6. Do you teach your students to be critical and analytical thinkers? If so, how? Is this learning happening with other teachers in the school? How do you know? (RQ:2)
7. The majority of your students are Black. Does this affect the way you teach and engage them? If so, how? If not, explain. (RQ:2,3)
8. Do you teach your students to be socially conscious? Are they learning their role in the world and their ability to shape and impact it? Explain. Is there a focus on leadership development in this school? Explain. (RQ:2)

### *Historical informant questions*

5. Tell me a little about the history of this school. What were the reasons this school was opened? (RQ:3)
6. In your view, is this school still needed today? Why? (RQ:1, 2, 3)
7. As someone who has watched many students matriculate through this school (many of whom are now adults), tell me what is the product of this school? What type of persons does this school produce? (RQ:2, 3, 4)
8. What has been your role in the school? Why were you involved in this capacity? (RQ:1, 3)

## Appendix B

### Focus Group Interview Questions

Questions were also structured to explore for the presence of elements of liberation and resistance as empirically defined in this study:

#### *Parent questions*

1. In your view, are there elements or factors at this school that contribute to student academic success? If so, what are they? (RQ:1-4)
2. How would you describe the educational and social environment of the school? (RQ:1,2)
3. Are you involved in your child's education? If so, how and why? If not, explain. Are you involved in the school? How, why? (RQ:3)
4. How does this school influence Black students? Explain. (RQ:2, 3)
5. Can you explain as a parent why you've chosen to send your child to a Black Seventh-day Adventist school? (RQ:2, 3, 4)

## **Appendix C**

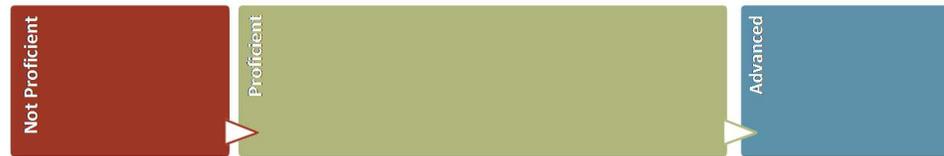
### Interpreting Proficiency Iowa Assessments Proficiency Scale

The following page is the Iowa Assessments proficiency scale in reading and math for grades 3-11. Proficiency is categorized by standard scores and organized into three achievement designations: not proficient, proficient, and advanced.



## Interpreting Proficiency

For accountability purposes, the state of Iowa has defined three achievement levels – Not Proficient, Proficient and Advanced. These achievement levels are used by the Department of Education in the calculation of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for schools and districts.



Students' performance on the Iowa Assessments determine their achievement level in these areas. The standard score is a number that describes a student's location on the achievement continuum. The tables below show the standard scores that are used to determine a student's achievement level. For example, in grade 3 a student who tested in the fall needs to obtain a standard score of 166 or higher on the Reading Test to be Proficient (P) as designated by the state of Iowa. A student who obtains a standard score 201 or higher is designated as Advanced (A) by the state. A student that earns a standard score less than 166 is designated as Not Proficient (NP). Likewise, in grade 4, a student who tested in the midyear needs to obtain a 185 or higher on the Mathematics Test to be Proficient (P) as designated by the state of Iowa. A student who earns a standard score greater than 216 is designated as Advanced (A) by the state.

### Reading

Grade	Fall			Midyear			Spring		
	NP	P	A	NP	P	A	NP	P	A
3	125–165	166–200	>200	125–169	170–208	>208	130–174	175–217	>217
4	130–181	182–223	>223	130–184	185–230	>230	135–188	189–235	>235
5	135–193	194–242	>242	135–197	198–247	>247	140–201	202–253	>253
6	140–206	207–258	>258	140–209	210–261	>261	145–212	213–264	>264
7	140–219	220–277	>277	145–222	223–282	>282	145–225	226–287	>287
8	145–231	232–292	>292	150–235	236–298	>298	150–238	239–303	>303
9	150–242	243–308	>308	150–246	247–312	>312	155–248	249–317	>317
10	155–251	252–320	>320	160–256	257–322	>322	160–256	257–325	>325
11	160–258	259–326	>326	165–261	262–329	>329	165–262	263–331	>331

### Mathematics

Grade	Fall			Midyear			Spring		
	NP	P	A	NP	P	A	NP	P	A
3	125–167	168–192	>192	125–172	173–197	>197	130–176	177–204	>204
4	130–180	181–210	>210	130–184	185–216	>216	135–188	189–223	>223
5	135–192	193–228	>228	135–196	197–235	>235	140–199	200–242	>242
6	140–205	206–245	>245	140–208	209–251	>251	145–211	212–257	>257
7	140–216	217–264	>264	145–218	219–270	>270	145–221	222–276	>276
8	145–228	229–281	>281	145–230	231–286	>286	150–235	236–290	>290
9	150–242	243–303	>303	150–248	249–306	>306	155–248	249–310	>310
10	155–251	252–313	>313	160–256	257–316	>316	160–256	257–319	>319
11	160–258	259–321	>321	165–260	261–324	>324	165–262	263–326	>326

## Appendix D

### North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists Curriculum Standards (Grade 4)

Below is a sample of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (NAD) curriculum standards for fourth graders. The NAD provides curriculum standards for all grades k-12 and all subjects. The following pages sample just a few pages from the entire set of fourth grade curriculum standards. For a complete listing of all curriculum standards, go to <https://adventisteducation.org/est.html> .

## ELEMENTARY STANDARDS BY GRADE LEVEL: GRADE 4

A PACIFIC UNION CONFERENCE CORRELATION OF NAD AND CCSS

# 4

Standards are what learners should know (content) and be able to do (skills), and serve as the framework for curriculum development. Standards in Seventh-day Adventist schools reflect the Adventist worldview across the K-12 curricula as well as the integration of national and provincial/state standards.

The standards have been coded for easy referral. The coding system that precedes each standard begins with the content area abbreviation. The second part of the code refers to the grade level. The third part of the code refers to the particular domain. The fourth part of the code refers to a particular skill within the domain. The coding system that follows each standard is the Common Core State Standard that aligns with the North American Division standard. When there is not a Common Core State Standard noted, there is no corresponding Common Core State Standard.

**Color Key:** Purple (North American Division Standards) Green (Common Core State Standards)  
Blue (Alignment with Fundamental Beliefs) Orange (International Society for Technology in Education)

BIBLE		
<b>BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS</b>		
<b>Essential Question:</b> Why is the Bible important today? <b>Big Idea:</b> The Bible is God’s word, preserved through the ages to help us learn about God, His plan for our lives, and His love for the world.		
<b>History of the Bible</b>	B.1-4.BF.1	Trace the development of the Bible from oral traditions to print. (1)
	B.1-4.BF.2	Identify the major events that led to the translation of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into English. (1)
	B.1-4.BF.3	Determine that the Bible was written by many people but inspired by God. (1)
	B.1-4.BF.4	Outline ways that God has protected His Word throughout history. (1)
<b>Organization of the Bible</b>	B.1-4.BF.5	Memorize the books of the Bible in order and locate specific Bible passages by book, chapter, and verse. (1)
	B.1-4.BF.6	Distinguish between various genres of writing in the Bible (e.g., parables, prophecy, history, letters). (1)
	B.1-4.BF.7	Identify the central theme of the Bible as the unfolding story of God’s love for us and His plan to save the world through His Son Jesus. (1, 4, 9, 10)
<b>Bible Study Skills</b>	B.1-4.BF.8	Make personal connections between Bible study and its application to daily living. (1, 8, 11)
	B.1-4.BF.9	Refer to details and examples when explaining a Bible passage or drawing inferences. (8)
	B.1-4.BF.10	Make connections between prayer and Bible study. (11)
	B.1-4.BF.11	Determine the main idea of a Bible passage and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the passage and share with others. (8)
	B.1-4.BF.12	Memorize passages of Scripture. (1)
	B.1-4.BF.13	Summarize what selected Bible passages reveal about God and identify their practical applications for daily life. (1, 8, 11)
	B.1-4.BF.14	Make connections between a Bible passage, personal experience, and other reading/viewing selections. (8, 11)
	B.1-4.BF.15	Select a personal Bible and develop the habit of reading it regularly. (1, 8, 11)
	B.1-4.BF.16	Explore the cultural and geographical contexts of Bible passages. (1)
	B.1-4.BF.17	Use secondary resources (e.g., Bible dictionary, concordance), both print and digital, to aid in interpreting Bible passages. (1)
B.1-4.BF.18	Participate in collaborative discussions about Bible passages. (1)	

LANGUAGE ARTS		
<b>READING – FOUNDATIONS</b>		
<p><b>Essential Question:</b> How can we honor God when we read, reflect, and respond to a variety of texts?  <b>Big Idea:</b> We honor God when we choose to reflect and respond to what we read in ways that help us grow in faith, learning, and service.</p>		
<b>Phonics and Word Recognition</b>	LA.4.RF.1	Use letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns, and morphology (e.g., roots and affixes) to read unfamiliar multisyllabic words both in and out of context. (RF.4.3)
<b>Fluency</b>	LA.4.RF.2	Read on-level text with purpose and understanding; read on-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression. (RF.4.4a-b)
	LA.4.RF.3	Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary. (RF.4.4c)
	LA.4.RF.4	Use silent reading strategies.
<b>READING – LITERATURE</b>		
<p><b>Essential Question:</b> How can we honor God when we read, reflect, and respond to a variety of texts?  <b>Big Idea:</b> We honor God when we choose to reflect and respond to what we read in ways that help us grow in faith, learning, and service.</p>		
<b>Key Ideas and Details</b>	LA.4.RL.1	Refer to details and examples when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences. (RL.4.1)
	LA.4.RL.2	Identify a theme of a story, drama, or poem; summarize the text. (RL.4.2)
	LA.4.RL.3	Describe in depth a character (e.g., thoughts, words, actions), setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text. (RL.4.3)
<b>Craft and Structure</b>	LA.4.RL.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases in context, including idioms. (RL.4.4)
	LA.4.RL.5	Explain major differences among poems, dramas, and stories by referring to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter), dramas (e.g., casts of characters, settings, dialogue, stage directions), and stories (e.g., plot, character, setting) when writing or speaking. (RL.4.5)
	LA.4.RL.6	Compare and contrast the point of view between first- and third-person narrations in different stories. (RL.4.6)
<b>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</b>	LA.4.RL.7	Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text. (RL.4.7)
	LA.4.RL.8	Compare and contrast literature with similar themes and topics from different cultures. (RL.4.9)
	LA.4.RL.9	Make connections between a text and personal life experiences and other texts.
	LA.4.RL.10	Select literature that reflects the teachings in God's Word.
<b>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</b>	LA.4.RL.11	Read and comprehend stories, drama, and poetry of appropriate complexity, independently and proficiently. (RL.4.10)
	LA.4.RL.12	Self-monitor reading strategies and make modifications as needed.
	LA.4.RL.13	Read literature for pleasure, personal growth, and spiritual development.
<b>READING – INFORMATIONAL TEXT</b>		
<p><b>Essential Question:</b> How can we honor God when we read, reflect, and respond to a variety of texts?  <b>Big Idea:</b> We honor God when we choose to reflect and respond to what we read in ways that help us grow in faith, learning, and service.</p>		
<b>Key Ideas and Details</b>	LA.4.RI.1	Refer to details and examples when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences. (RI.4.1)

LANGUAGE ARTS		
	LA.4.RI.2	Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text. (RI.4.2)
	LA.4.RI.3	Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why. (RI.4.3)
<b>Craft and Structure</b>	LA.4.RI.4	Determine the meaning of content-specific words and phrases in context. (RI.4.4)
	LA.4.RI.5	Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text. (RI.4.5)
	LA.4.RI.6	Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic, describing the differences in focus and the information provided. (RI.4.6)
<b>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</b>	LA.4.RI.7	Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, interactive technologies) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text. (RI.4.7)
	LA.4.RI.8	Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular ideas. (RI.4.8)
	LA.4.RI.9	Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject. (RI.4.9)
	LA.4.RI.10	Select informational text that affirms the teachings in God's Word.
<b>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</b>	LA.4.RI.11	Read and comprehend informational texts (e.g., history/social studies, science, technical texts) of appropriate complexity independently and proficiently. (RI.4.10)
	LA.4.RI.12	Self-monitor reading strategies and make modifications as needed.
	LA.4.RI.13	Read literary nonfiction for personal growth and spiritual development.
WRITING		
<b>Essential Question:</b> How can we honor God when we write for a variety of purposes and audiences?		
<b>Big Idea:</b> We honor God when we choose to write in ways that affirm the teachings in His Word.		
<b>Text Types and Purposes</b>	LA.4.W.1	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts that include: an introduction, a point of view with reasons and organized information, linking words and phrases (e.g., for instance, in order to, in addition), and a conclusion. (W.4.1)
	LA.4.W.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information that include: an introduction, supporting details (e.g., facts, definitions, quotations, examples) grouped in paragraphs and sections, precise language and content-specific vocabulary, ideas linked within categories using words and phrases (e.g., another, for example, also, because), formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations and multimedia when useful, and a conclusion. (W.4.2)
	LA.4.W.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events that include: effective techniques (e.g., dialogue, description), sensory details, transitions, clear event sequences, a situation, a narrator and/or characters, and a conclusion. (W.4.3)
	LA.4.W.4	Produce writing that honors God and affirms the principles in His Word.
<b>Production and Distribution of Writing</b>	LA.4.W.5	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization (e.g., chronological, cause and effect, similarities and differences) are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (W.4.4)
	LA.4.W.6	With adult and peer support, develop and strengthen writing by planning, revising, and editing. (W.4.5)
	LA.4.W.7	With support, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing (using grade-appropriate keyboarding skills), as well as to interact and collaborate. (W.4.6)
	LA.4.W.8	Apply common conventions of handwriting (e.g., margins, headings, legible manuscript and cursive writing).
<b>Research to Build and Present</b>	LA.4.W.9	Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic. (W.4.7)

LANGUAGE ARTS		
Knowledge	LA.4.W.10	Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes, categorize information, and list sources. (W.4.8)
	LA.4.W.11	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. (W.4.9)
Range of Writing	LA.4.W.12	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. (W.4.10)
SPEAKING AND LISTENING		
<p><b>Essential Question:</b> How does the ability to listen and speak effectively help us to better understand God, others, and ourselves?  <b>Big Idea:</b> The ability to listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations allows us to communicate information, ideas, and feelings to better understand God, others, and ourselves.</p>		
Comprehension and Collaboration	LA.4.SL.1	Engage in collaborative discussions in diverse groups, extending others' ideas and expressing one's own with clarity: prepare and use required reading material; follow agreed-upon rules and carry out assigned roles; pose and respond to questions to clarify or follow up on information; review key ideas. (SL.4.1)
	LA.4.SL.2	Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally). (SL.4.2.)
	LA.4.SL.3	Identify reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points. (SL.4.3)
Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas	LA.4.SL.4	Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace. (SL.4.4)
	LA.4.SL.5	Use digital media for presentations when appropriate. (SL.4.5)
	LA.4.SL.6	Differentiate between contexts that call for formal English and situations where informal discourse is appropriate; use formal English when appropriate to task and situation. (SL.4.6)
	LA.4.SL.7	Demonstrate reverence to God when speaking and listening.
LANGUAGE		
<p><b>Note:</b> The inclusion of Language standards in their own domain should not be taken as an indication that skills related to conventions, effective language use, and vocabulary are unimportant to reading, writing, speaking, and listening; indeed, they are inseparable from such contexts.</p>		
Conventions of Standard English	LA.4.L.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking: use relative pronouns (e.g., who, which, that, whoever), relative adverbs (e.g., where, when, why), and modal auxiliaries (e.g., can, may, must); form and use progressive verb tenses (e.g., I was walking, I am walking, I will be walking) and prepositional phrases; correctly use homonyms; order adjectives within sentences (e.g., a small red bag rather than a red small bag); produce complete sentences, correcting inappropriate fragments and run-ons. (L.4.1)
	LA.4.L.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing: use commas and quotation marks to denote direct speech and quotations from a text; use a comma before a coordinating conjunction in a compound sentence; spell grade-appropriate words, consulting references as needed. (L.4.2)
Knowledge of Language	LA.4.L.3	Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening: choose precise words and phrases to convey ideas; punctuate for effect; differentiate between contexts that call for formal English and informal discourse. (L.4.3)

LANGUAGE ARTS		
Vocabulary Acquisition and Use	LA.4.L.4	Determine the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases, choosing from a range of strategies: use context (e.g., definitions, examples, restatements) and grade-appropriate Greek and Latin affixes and roots (e.g., telegraph, photograph, autograph) as clues to the meaning of a word or phrase; consult print and digital references, including thesauruses, for pronunciation and meaning. (L.4.4)
	LA.4.L.5	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings: explain the meaning of simple similes and metaphors in context; explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs; demonstrate understanding of words by relating them to their antonyms and synonyms. (L.4.5)
	LA.4.L.6	Acquire and use content-specific words and phrases, including those that signal precise actions, emotions, or states of being that are basic to a particular topic. (L.4.6)

MATHEMATICS		
<b>NUMBERS AND OPERATIONS</b>		
<p><b>Essential Question:</b> What does numerical reasoning involve and what does it demonstrate about God's world?  <b>Big Idea:</b> Numerical reasoning with whole numbers and fractions demonstrates dependability and order in God's world.</p>		
Place Value	4.NO.1	Use place value understanding of multi-digit whole numbers to round to any place up to millions. (4.NBT.1,3)
	4.NO.2	Read, write, compare, and understand whole numbers using standard, number name, and expanded forms. (4.NBT.2)
Basic Operations	4.NO.3	Add and subtract multi-digit whole numbers; multiply up to 4 digits X 1 digit and 2 digits X 2 digits; divide using a one-digit divisor and up to a four-digit dividend with and without a remainder. (4.NBT.4,5,6)
Fractions/Decimals	4.NO.4	Understand, express, and order fractions with different numerators and denominators; numerically express equivalent fractions. (4.NF.1,2)
	4.NO.5	Add and subtract fractions and mixed numbers with common denominators; multiply fractions by whole numbers. (4.NF.3,4)
	4.NO.6	Understand, compare, and use decimal notation for fractions with denominators of 10 or 100. (4.NF.5,6,7)
<b>OPERATIONS AND ALGEBRAIC THINKING</b>		
<p><b>Essential Question:</b> How do numerical patterns link us to an infinite God?  <b>Big Idea:</b> Exploring numerical patterns through problem solving links us to an infinite God by demonstrating His order and constancy.</p>		
Multiplication	4.OAT.1	Memorize and fluently multiply using the multiplication facts through 12.
Problem Solving	4.OAT.2	Solve multi-step word problems including remainder interpretation and estimate to check; create equations with a letter for the unknown. (4.OA.1,2,3)
Factors	4.OAT.3	Find all factor pairs for a whole number within 100; identify whole numbers as prime or composite. (4.OA.4)
	4.OAT.4	Understand the basic concepts of least common multiple (LCM) and greatest common factor (GCF).
Patterns	4.OAT.5	Generate and analyze number and shape patterns. (4.OA.5)

MATHEMATICS		
<b>MEASUREMENT</b>		
<b>Essential Question:</b> What do the attributes of measurement reveal about God? <b>Big Idea:</b> The attributes of measurement reveal God's accuracy, dependability, and precision.		
<b>Measurement/ Conversion</b>	4.M.1	Solve problems involving measurement (time, volume, mass, money, simple fractions, decimals, distance). (4.MD.2)
	4.M.2	Convert measurement from a larger unit to a smaller unit (km, m, cm; kg, g; lb, oz; L, mL; hr, min, sec). (4.MD.1)
	4.M.3	Apply area and perimeter formulas. (4.MD.3)
	4.M.4	Read a Fahrenheit and Celsius thermometer knowing the significance of 32°F, 212°F, 0°C, and 100°C.
<b>Angles</b>	4.M.5	Recognize angles as geometric shapes that are formed wherever two rays share a common end point; understand concepts of angle measurement and measure angles in whole-number degrees. (4.MD.5,6,7)
<b>Money</b>	4.M.6	Know how to count up to make change.
<b>GEOMETRY</b>		
<b>Essential Question:</b> What does geometry reveal about God? <b>Big Idea:</b> God is revealed as the Master Designer when geometry is used as a means of describing the attributes of the physical world.		
<b>Lines/Angles</b>	4.GEO.1	Draw and identify points, lines, line segments, rays, angles, and perpendicular and parallel lines. (4.G.1)
	4.GEO.2	Classify figures with perpendicular and parallel lines, and angles of a specified size. (4.G.2)
	4.GEO.3	
<b>DATA ANALYSIS, STATISTICS, AND PROBABILITY</b>		
<b>Essential Question:</b> How can we quantify our findings in a way that pleases God? <b>Big Idea:</b> God has at various times commanded men to count, measure, and record their findings.		
<b>Data</b>	4.DSP.1	Solve addition and subtraction problems using a line plot to display a data set of measurement in fractions of a unit (halves, fourths, and eighths). (4.MD.4)

PHYSICAL EDUCATION		
<b>MOTOR SKILLS</b>		
<b>Essential Question:</b> Why did God create our bodies for movement? <b>Big Idea:</b> Movement contributes to healthy physical development, in keeping with God's original plan for our lives.		
<b>Locomotor</b>	PE.4.MS.1	Uses various locomotor skills in a variety of small-sided practice tasks and educational gymnastics experiences. (S1.E1.4)
	PE.4.MS.2	Runs for distance using a mature pattern. (S1.E2.4)
	PE.4.MS.3	Uses spring-and-step takeoffs and landings specific to gymnastics. (S1.E3.4)
	PE.4.MS.4	Combines traveling with manipulative skills (e.g., dribbling, throwing) in teacher-and/or student-designed small-sided practice tasks. (S1.E6.4)
<b>Non-locomotor</b>	PE.4.MS.5	Balances on different bases of support on apparatus, demonstrating levels and shapes. (S1.E7.4)

## Appendix E

### “Hey Black Child” Poem by Useni Eugene Perkins

Hey Black Child  
Do you know who you are  
Who you really are  
Do you know you can be  
What you want to be  
If you try to be  
What you can be

Hey Black Child  
Do you know where you are going  
Where you're really going  
Do you know you can learn  
What you want to learn  
If you try to learn  
What you can learn

Hey Black Child  
Do you know you are strong  
I mean really strong  
Do you know you can do  
What you want to do  
If you try to do  
What you can do

Hey Black Child  
Be what you can be  
Learn what you must learn  
Do what you can do  
And tomorrow your nation  
Will be what you want it to be

## Appendix F

### Franklin School Mission Statement

Franklin School is committed to training students to emulate the character of the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, by developing them spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially for this world and the world to come.

The staff of the Franklin Adventist School believes that all students should have an equal and equitable opportunity to learn at our school.

- We believe in the triangular approach to Christian education. This is the cooperation and the harmonious coexistence with the parent, teacher, and student.
- We believe that all students can achieve mastery of basic grade level skills, regardless of their background, socio-economic status, race or previous academic performance.
- We believe our purpose is to educate all students and help them achieve high levels of academic performance.
- We believe it is our goal is to point students heavenward, and to foster positive growth in social attitudes and behavior, as well as academic growth.
- We accept the responsibility to teach all students so that they can achieve their utmost physical, mental, and spiritual potential, in a pleasant, safe, and caring environment.

## Appendix G

### Franklin School History

Visionaries from the Greater Hope and Central City Seventh-day Adventist Churches, along with the Piedmont Conference of Seventh-day Adventists saw the need for a Christ-centered school which would be sensitive and responsive to the uniqueness of Black students, in particular, and diversity-minded families. The school is conveniently located in a metropolitan area. Under the sponsorship of those two churches, the doors of Franklin Seventh-day Adventist School opened in September of 1987. This accomplishment was the result of years of dreaming, praying, talking and deciding; and two intense years of fundraising, strategizing, meeting and working.

The school's first location was the Central City Adventist Church building. Four teachers – one serving as principal, staffed 68 students in grades 1-8.

In one year, the enrollment doubled! At the end of just six years, the overcrowded school, with its bulging waiting list, made it necessary to move into a newly constructed school building which could house a maximum of 250 students. The new building had ten classrooms, a fully equipped science lab, library, computer lab, multi-purpose room for lunch and assemblies, music studio for private music lessons, teachers' work room/lounge, and an administrative office complex. There is ample playground and parking space.

The staff of certified teachers, individual students, and the school as a whole, have several awards for achievements in academics and the arts.

The history of the school is still unfolding. You are invited to be a part of the legacy and promise of Franklin Adventist School.

## Appendix H

### Franklin School Creed

Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. Godliness-godlikeness is the goal to be reached. Before me there is opened a path of continual progress. I have an object to achieve, a standard to attain, that includes everything good, and pure, and noble.

I am created in the image of God and I am endowed with power akin to that of the Creator - individuality, power to think and to do. I will develop my power to think, and not be a mere reflector of other men's thoughts.

I must face the practical realities of life, its opportunities, its responsibilities, its defeats, and its successes. How I meet these experiences, whether I become a master or victim of circumstance depends largely upon my preparation to cope - my education.

I will use my time wisely today! I will learn something new today! I will be successful today! I will have no other gods before Thee. I will not make unto Thee any graven images nor bow down myself to serve them. I will not take the name of the Lord in vain. I will remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. I will honor my father and my mother. I will not kill. I will not commit adultery. I will not steal. I will not bear false witness against my neighbor. I will not covet anything that is my neighbors.

The greatest want of the world is the want of men; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall. But such a character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature, the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man.

Church school serves as a barrier against widespread corruption, provides for mental and spiritual welfare, and promotes prosperity of the nation by furnishing it with men qualified to act in the fear and admonition of God as leaders.

My happiness for this life and for the future immortal life lies with me. I will not be content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. I will seek higher attainments.

Christ will be the center of my life and I will be a servant of God and a friend to man. This is my time, my place, and my opportunity. I accept the challenge to be all I can be.

**Appendix I**

Franklin Tuition Schedule 2020-21

Grade	Standard Rate		Non-Constituent Adventist Discount Rate		Constituent Adventist Discount Rate	
	Monthly	Annually	Monthly	Annually	Monthly	Annually
K	\$840	\$8,400	\$660	\$6,600	\$660	\$6,600
Grades 1-8	\$840	\$8,400	\$740	\$7,400	\$610	\$6,100

## Appendix J

### "Call to Action"

Song by Anthony Brown and Group Therapy, 2020

Too many have died  
Too much hate  
There's still hope for tomorrow  
But something has to change now

Not tomorrow but today  
Something must be done  
What we see cannot continue  
Our ancestors paved the way  
And now it's up to us  
We've been given trust to make a change

What kind of world will we lead to our children  
If we do nothing (if we do nothing)  
All the blood of those we lost will be on our hands  
We must take a stand now

I'm talking to you, and you, and you  
And the ones beside you  
We can all do something  
(We can all do something)  
I'm talking to you, and you, and you  
And the ones around you  
It's time for you to take your place  
In this race

It's time to run, it's time to fly  
It's time to live with those who died  
It's time to pray and to believe  
That we can stand in unity, yeah  
Things have got to change, yeah  
We can't just let this happen  
There's no more time to waste, no

Say it, this is our time it's a call to action  
This is our time it's a call to action  
This is our time it's a call to action  
This is our time it's a call to action  
It's a call to action, yeah

Someone tell me where would we be  
If it had not been for  
Those who paved the way so we could be free  
Freedom's still so far away  
When bloods still shed and those  
Who are responsible  
Go free instead

What kind of world will we leave to our children  
If we do nothing (if we do nothing)?  
All the blood of those we lost will be on our hands  
We must take a stand now

I'm talking to you, and you, and you  
And the ones beside you  
We can all do something  
(We can all do something)  
I'm talking to you, and you, and you  
And the ones around you  
It's time for you to take your place  
In this race

It's time to run, it's time to fly  
It's time to live with those that died  
It's time to pray and to believe  
That we can stand in unity

Say it, this is our time it's a call to action  
This is our time it's a call to action  
This is our time it's a call to action  
This is our time it's a call to action  
It's a call to action, yeah  
Here we go, here we go

It's time for us to stand up, stand up  
It's time for us to stand up, stand up  
Use your voice and stand up, stand up  
Use your voice and stand up, stand up, yeah  
Use your mind and stand up, stand up (yes, sir)  
Use your time and stand up, stand up (yes, sir)  
Every race, stand up, stand up  
Every religion, stand up, stand up  
Every creed of God, stand up, stand up

Across borderline, stand up, stand up  
It's time for us to stand up, stand up  
It's time for us to stand up

Say their names

For George Floyd

Stand up, stand up

For Freddie Gray

Stand up, stand up

For Breonna Taylor

Stand up, stand up

For Trayvon Martin

Stand up, stand up

For Sandra Bland

Stand up, stand up

For Tamir Rice

Stand up, stand up

For Mike Brown

Stand up, stand up

For Jordan Davis

Stand up, stand up

For Stephon Clark

Stand up, stand up

For Botham Jean

Stand up, stand up

For Stephon Davis

Stand up, stand up

For Ahmaud Arbery

Stand up, stand up

For Atatiana Jefferson

Stand up, stand up

For Alton Sterling (stop killing us)

Stand up, stand up

For Oscar Grant (stop killing us)

Stand up, stand up

For Renisha McBride (stop killing us)

Stand up, stand up

For Walter Scott (stop killing us)

Stand up, stand up

For Anthony Hill (stop killing us)

Stand up, stand up

For Eric Garner (stop killing us)  
Stand up, stand up  
For Emmitt Till  
Stand up, stand up  
And the countless kings and queens we didn't name  
It's a shame it's gotta end

What we see will change  
We can't just let this happen  
There's no more time to waste, no  
This is our time—It's a call to action!

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